



OSPREY AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES® • 73



Early German Aces of World War 1

Greg VanWyngarden



MARK FOSTERHWAITE

GREG VANWYNGARDEN

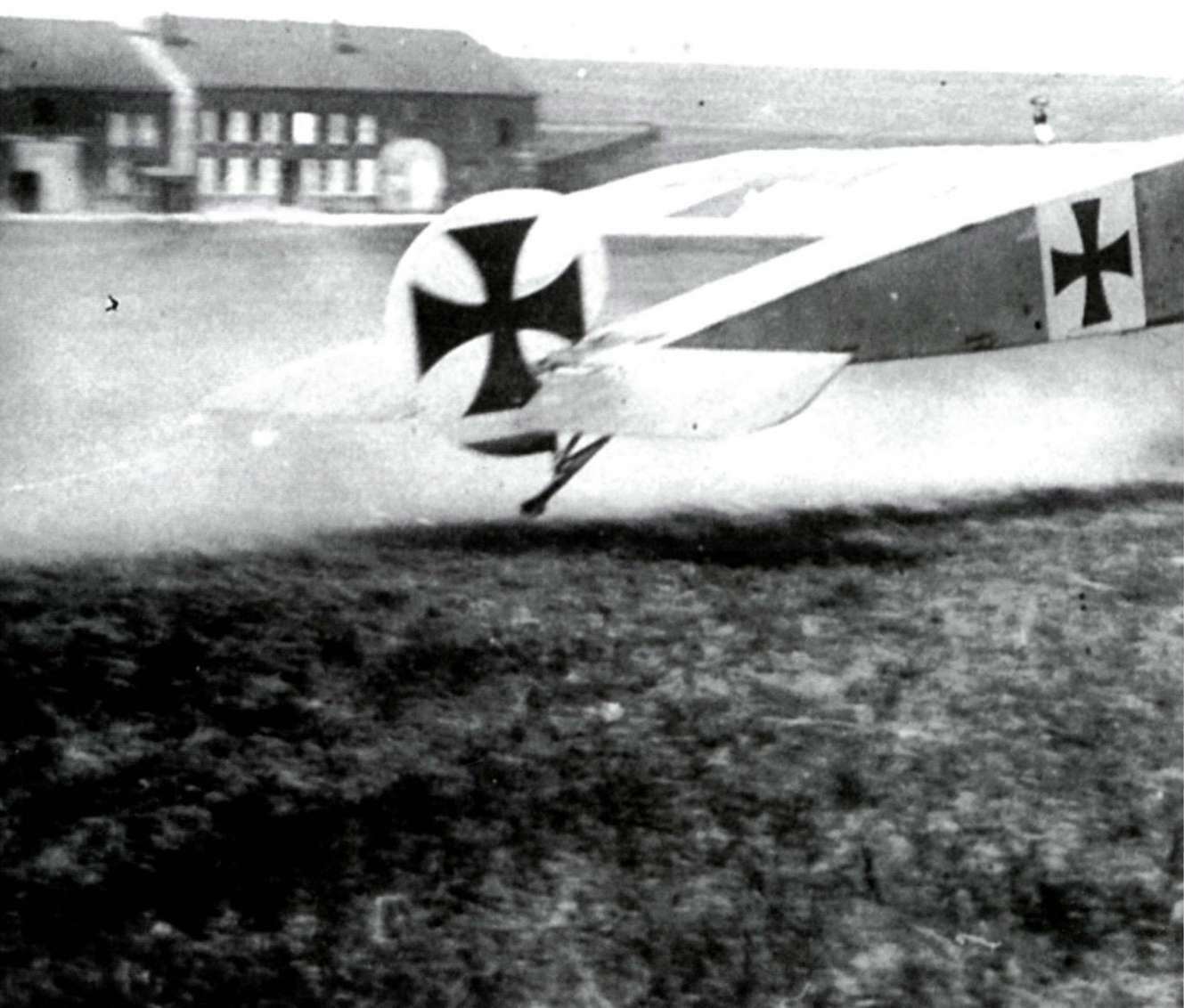
has had a lifelong interest in World War 1 aviation, and has been particularly active in deciphering the colours and markings that decorated the various German fighters flown by the leading aces. This is his sixth book for Osprey, and he is currently working on the Aviation Elite Units volume chronicling the exploits of Jasta 'Boelcke'.

HARRY DEMPSEY has

been passionate about World War 1 aviation for over 30 years, resulting in his production of some of the most technically accurate artwork on the subject for Osprey's Aircraft of the Aces series. He has illustrated all the World War 1 titles in Osprey's ever-growing range of best-selling aviation titles.

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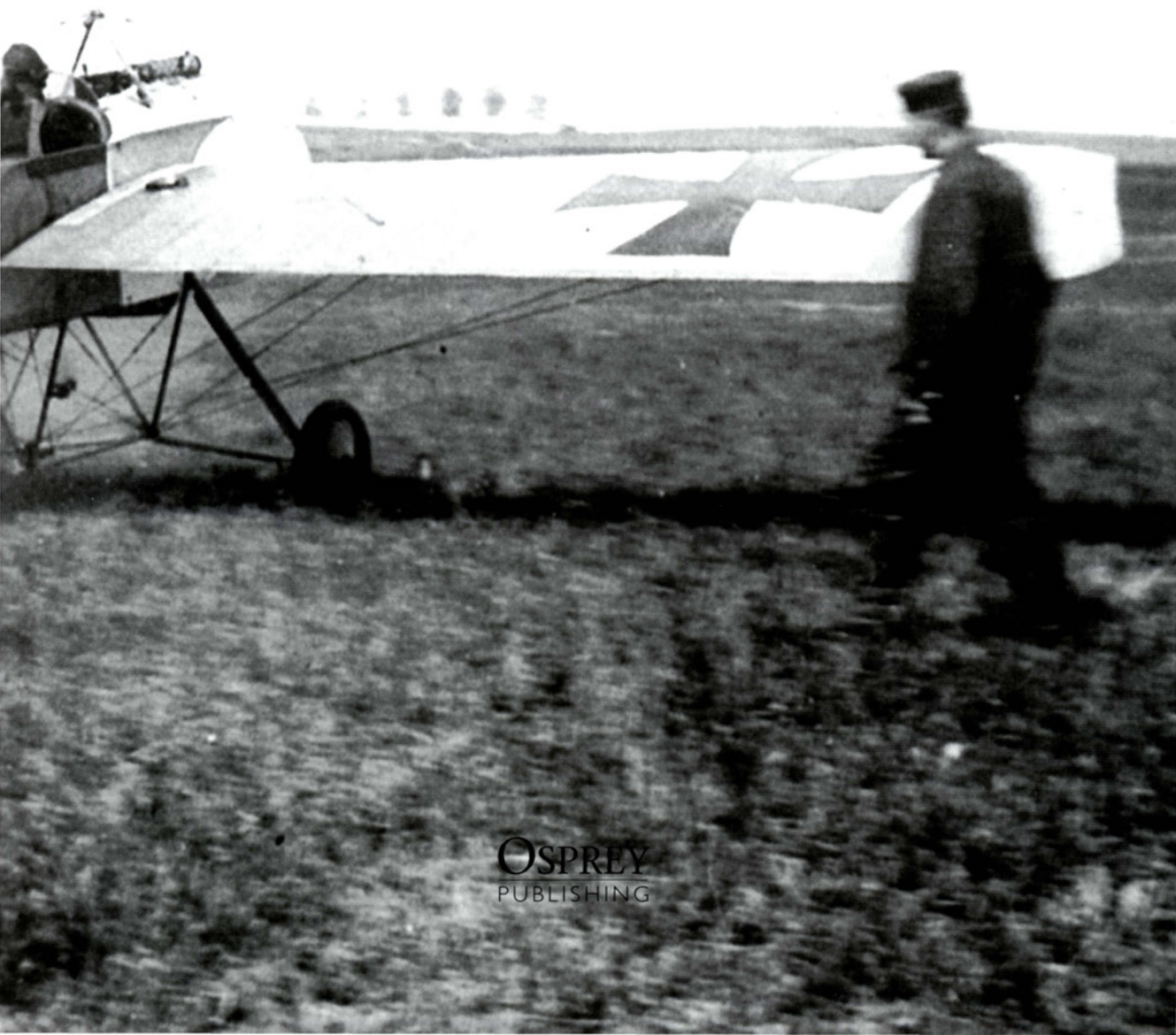


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Front Cover

On the morning of 26 October 1915, Vickers FB 5 'Gunbus' 5462 from No 11 Sqn, Royal Flying Corps (RFC), took off on a reconnaissance patrol from Cambrai to Péronne. The unit was in the midst of transferring to a new landing ground, and flight commander Capt C C Darley was flying with the partially trained 2Lt R J Slade as his observer. The FB 5 crossed the lines three miles south of Arras. Unbeknownst to the crew, they were being stalked by Lt n d R Max Immelmann of *Feldflieger Abteilung 62*, already famous as one of Germany's best exponents of the new Fokker Eindecker fighter, equipped with a revolutionary synchronised machine gun that fired through the arc of the rotating propeller. Immelmann wrote;

'I took off at 0930 hrs on 26 October. I had just climbed to 3500 metres when I saw an enemy airman fly over the lines by Arras and make for Cambrai. I let him fly on eastward for a while, then I took up the pursuit, hiding behind his tail all the time. I followed him for about a quarter of an hour in this fashion. My fingers were itching to shoot, but I controlled myself and withheld my fire until I was within 60 metres of him. I could plainly see the observer in the front seat peering out downwards.

"Knack-Knack-Knack" went my gun. Fifty rounds, and then a long flame shot out of his engine. Another 50 rounds at the pilot. Now his fate was sealed. He went down in wide spirals to land.

'Almost every bullet of my first series went home. Elevator, rudder, wings, engine, tank and control wires were shot up. The pilot had a bullet in the right upper arm. I had also shot his right thumb away. The machine had received 40 hits. The observer was unwounded. His machine gun was in perfect working order, but he had not fired a single shot, so complete was the surprise I had sprung on him.'

Darley managed to land his crippled 'pusher' near Ecoust St Mein behind the German lines. Aerial warfare was still in its innocent infancy, and airmen on both sides frequently extended chivalrous courtesies to captured opponents. Immelmann landed near the riddled British aircraft and rendered what aid he could to the

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wounded pilot before he was taken to a field hospital. The 'Gunbus' had become another example of what some discouraged RFC airmen were calling 'Fokker fodder'. It was confirmed as the fifth victory for Immelmann, who was well on his way to earning his nickname of *der Adler von Lille* (the Eagle of Lille). Immelmann and others like him were entering a period of aerial supremacy which some would call the 'Fokker Scourge' (Cover artwork by Mark Postlethwaite)

Titlepage Spread

Oblt Kurt Student, commander of the *Fokkerstaffel* of AOK 3, takes off from Leffincourt airfield in his Fokker E III in this evocative view. Student scored six victories in World War 1, three of them in a Fokker Eindecker. In World War 2 he was commander of the German paratroop forces



CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

BIRTH OF THE FLYING GUN 6

CHAPTER TWO

'FOKKER SCOURGE' 25

CHAPTER THREE

THE TIDE TURNS 57

CHAPTER FOUR

JAGDSTAFFELN TAKE FLIGHT 70

APPENDICES 89

COLOUR PLATES COMMENTARY 89

INDEX 96

BIRTH OF THE FLYING GUN

When Germany entered World War 1 in August 1914, its young air service – the *Fliegertruppe* – was equipped primarily with two-seater aircraft whose purpose was entirely that of reconnaissance. One *Feldflieger Abteilung* (field aviation unit) was allotted to every one of the eight Army Headquarters, and one to each of the 25 regular Corps HQs as well. In the war's initial months, the skies were relatively empty, and encounters with hostile aircraft were rare. This was just as well, for German two-seaters were unarmed, save for the occasional revolvers and rifles carried by the aircrew.

By early 1915, as the trench lines began to solidify and aerial activity intensified near the frontlines, meetings between aeroplanes from opposite sides gradually increased. By that time a number of Allied 'pusher' aircraft were armed with light machine guns of the Hotchkiss or superb Lewis variety, and German crew members consequently upgraded their own armament with carbines and even the occasional captured Allied machine gun. There had initially been no German model of a machine gun light enough for aerial use, and although examples of the new Parabellum LMG14 and the Bergmann LMG slowly began to reach aviation units in early 1915, numbers remained insufficient for widespread fitment to aircraft in the frontline.

By April 1915 the first examples of the new C type of German two-seater, armed with a Parabellum gun in the rear cockpit and powered by engines of 150 to 180 horsepower, made their appearance at the front in the form of the Albatros C I. This was soon followed by the LVG C I and C II. These sturdy, powerful aircraft were fitted with a rotatable turret for the observer's machine gun, which became the standard configuration for German two-seaters for some time to come.

The Aviatik C I reached the front circa September 1915, and oddly enough had the observer and his machine gun in the front cockpit. These machines provided aggressive aircrews with an increased offensive potential, and a number of future fighter aces would obtain their first victories in C types. A different approach produced twin-engined and pusher machines which had the observers placed in the forward cockpit of the nacelle, allowing them to fire the machine gun directly ahead. The most notable of these were the twin-boom pusher Ago C I and the twin-engined AEG G types, both of which were tested as viable options for air-fighting in the latter half of 1915.

Of course, the most efficient way of firing a machine gun from an aircraft would be to fix it in place so that it fired forward directly along the line of flight. If this was mounted in a tractor aeroplane, it naturally presented the problem of how to fire the weapon through the rotating propeller blades without destroying them. Various solutions had been proposed for some time in different countries. As early as

15 July 1913, a patent was granted to engineer Franz Schneider for a synchronisation device that permitted a machine gun to fire between the rapidly spinning propeller blades.

Schneider was a Swiss citizen who had left the French Nieuport firm to work for Luftverkehrs Gesellschaft (LVG) in Germany – he had also been responsible for developing the rotating gun turret installed on C type aeroplanes. Incredibly, full details of his patent were published in the German periodical *Flugsport* in September 1914. Schneider patented the idea but was turned down by the Prussian War Ministry when he attempted to requisition a machine gun to begin practical development. It was left to the pressures of war to lead to German initiation of the synchronised machine gun concept.

In France, aircraft designer Raymond Saulnier had also been experimenting with synchronisation since the spring of 1914. Difficulties with his device led him to abandon the idea and instead fit metal deflector wedges to the aircraft's propeller to allow the gun to fire through the spinning airscrew. Saulnier had been forced to end his experimentation when war broke out.

In December 1914, however, the famous pre-war aviator Roland Garros – now a reconnaissance pilot with *Escadrille MS26* – visited the Morane-Saulnier works and picked up the development of the armoured propeller idea where Saulnier had left off. Garros eventually had a workable installation fitted to his Morane-Saulnier type L, and history was made on 1 April 1915 when he shot down a German aeroplane with his new device.

Two more victories followed rapidly on 15 and 18 April, but on the latter date Garros was downed by ground fire. He succeeded in burning his aircraft before being taken prisoner, but the gun and armoured propeller remained intact and were now in enemy hands. Almost immediately the German authorities made plans to replicate the device for use on its machines.

At this point the brilliant and flamboyant Dutch aircraft designer Anthony Fokker enters the story. In 1914 he had brought out his Fokker M F, an aircraft closely modelled on the Morane-Saulnier type G shoulder-winged monoplane. Fokker's aeroplane was no mere copy, however, for he incorporated a steel-tube fuselage and improved flight characteristics to produce a finely balanced and superior machine.

The monoplane was produced in two versions by Fokker's factory in Schwerin, namely the M 5K (military designation A I) with a wingspan of 8.95 metres, and the M 5L (A II) with a longer span of 10.9 metres. Both designs were powered by the Oberursel U 0 rotary engine of 80 hp, which was a licence-built copy of the seven-cylinder Gnôme. The A I and A II

Anthony H G Fokker is seen with the aircraft that brought him fame – the Fokker Eindecker, with its synchronised machine gun. This aircraft is an E II powered by the 100 hp nine-cylinder Oberursel U I. Most likely this is the first E II (Wk-Nr 257), which Fokker took to the front as a demonstration machine



were produced in small quantities for the *Fliegertruppe* to serve as 'cavalry' aircraft, or light two-seat reconnaissance aeroplanes.

As the eminent historian Peter M Grosz has revealed, the deputy director of *Idflieg* (the Inspectorate of military aviation), Major Helmut Förster recalled that the capture of Garros' device 'provided an immediate incentive to try something similar on our side'. According to Grosz, Förster's writings also indicate that German authorities made the surprising discovery that the Fokker Werke *already* had a mechanism completed which allowed firing 'through the propeller disc with considerable more safety than Garros' device'.

Fokker's famous story (first told in the authorised biography *Flying Dutchman* by Bruce Gould, written in 1929) that he conceived, developed and installed a synchronisation device in 48 hours is obviously an invention, as research by Grosz, Alex Imrie and others has repeatedly shown. It is instead far more likely that Fokker and his engineers had been working on a mechanical synchronisation gear for some six months, no doubt 'inspired' by the details of the Schneider device which had been detailed in *Flugsport*. Fokker's *Gestängesteuerung*, or pushrod control, permitted the gun to shoot only when the propeller was out of the line of fire.

The Fokker Aeroplanbau GmbH at Schwerin was provided with an air-cooled Parabellum gun that was soon installed on a Fokker M 5K. Firing trials of the new weapon were held at Döberitz, west of Berlin, reportedly on 19-20 May 1915. The authorities must have been impressed. Five A III (M 5K) single-seat 'cavalry' monoplanes which were already on order were subsequently armed with Fokker's synchronised gun, and *Idflieg* redesignated the machines E types (E stood for *Eindecker mit MG*, or monoplane with MG). With the

The first armed Fokker monoplane accepted by the *Fliegertruppe*, this Fokker A III was marked with the designation A 16/15 and the name of its pilot, Lt n Parschau. It was equipped with a Parabellum LMG 14 machine gun and was used by Parschau when he was instructing pilots at *Feldflieger Abteilung 62* in its use. Note the high position of the wing and the FFA 62 black and white unit marking aft of the cockpit



factory designation of M 5KMG, these five aeroplanes would be numbered E 1/15 to E 5/15, and were accepted in June.

An order for 36 Fokker E types numbered 86/15 to 121/15 was dated 28 August 1915 – most of these would be armed with the superior ‘Spandau’ MG 08 machine gun. However, the very first armed Fokker monoplane to leave Schwerin was an A III designated A 16/15 armed with a Parabellum gun, which was shipped from the factory on 30 May 1915. It was the personal aircraft of Lt n Otto Parschau, a pre-war flier who had a long association with Fokker and his machines, and he would use it to demonstrate the type to frontline pilots.

Destined to become one of the pre-eminent Eindecker aces, Otto Parschau was born on 11 November 1890 in Klutznick, in the Allensteiner region of East Prussia. Having entered the *Infanterie Regt Nr 151* in 1910, he was commissioned a year later. He obtained flight training at Johannisthal, Darmstadt and Hanover, and received his pilot’s licence on 4 July 1913.

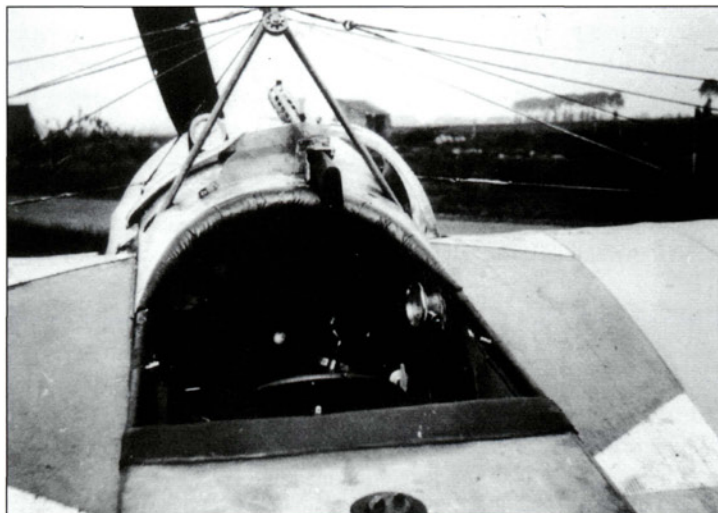
When the war broke out he was already in the *Fliegertruppe*, and was assigned a Fokker M 5L that had been the personal machine of an Oberleutnant von Buttlar. This aircraft had been specifically painted green for von Buttlar, the colour of his Marburg *Jäger* regiment. Parschau picked up his ‘green machine’ and flew it for nearly a year on a roving commission with *FFA 22*, *FFA 42* and *Brieftauben-Abteilung Ostende* (literally ‘Carrier Pigeon Section at Ostende’, a cover name usually rendered as *BAO*). The latter was a unique formation with the strength of about four *Flieger Abteilungen*, responsible to the *Oberste Heeresleitung* or OHL (High Command), and was formed to carry out concentrated bombing attacks on the enemy.

Parschau flew his green Fokker on the Champagne front in October–November 1914, then Flanders, Alsace-Lorraine, before being posted to West Prussia and Galicia, on the Eastern Front. His worn-out ‘green machine’ was eventually marked on the fuselage with records of all its different campaigns, but by that time Parschau felt it was ready for a museum. He had frequently communicated with Fokker, and as a technically proficient pilot with a great deal of experience on his rotary-engined designs, was selected to go to *FFA 62* at Douai to provide instruction on flying the monoplanes using Fokker A 16/15.

Anthony Fokker himself had arrived at Stenay in the German V. *Armee* sector on 13 June, when he demonstrated his new aircraft for the German crown prince and other top brass. On 28 July 1915 Parschau wrote a letter to Fokker (translated by P M Grosz);

‘In the last weeks heavy demands have been made on me.

This close-up view of Parschau’s A 16/15 provides a look at the Parabellum gun – Parschau recorded his great frustration with this weapon. On most A III machines there were open sections in the wing at the root to improve the pilot’s view, but they have been covered over here





Otto Parschau is seen here with his later E I 1/15, still armed with a Parabellum gun – the cowling has been removed during motor maintenance. The wing has been lowered to the position which became standard

As of 16 July, I departed from *Abteilung* 62 and am now again at *BAO* in Ghisteltes. I have already had three combats with your 100 hp machine. Unfortunately after a few shots, the gun jammed. Enough to drive one crazy. The Parabellum gun is going to bring me to my grave. The five aircraft that were delivered to Douai with the MG 08 have proven to be excellent. My students there have not experienced a jam up to now. Yesterday, I was in Lille in Freyburg's *Abteilung*, and there an offizierstellvertreter had a combat during which 540 rounds were fired without stoppage.'

Among the students who benefited from Parschau's instruction at *FFA* 62 were a pair of pilots destined to carve out legendary reputations as Germany's first two top fighter aces – Max Immelmann and Oswald Boelcke. Historian Peter Kilduff translated the following letter written by Immelmann on 25 June 1915;

'Recently, we received two small combat monoplanes from the Fokker factory. Primarily to see these fighting machines, yesterday the Crown Prince of Bavaria visited the field and inspected us and *Abteilung* 20. Director Fokker, the constructor of the combat aircraft, was presented to him. He, as well as a Leutnant Parschau, flew the aircraft and fired from the air at the ground. Fokker, especially, amazed us with his skill.'

FIRST VICTORY

While Immelmann has generally been credited with the first victory attained in a Fokker Eindecker fighter, research by Alex Imrie and others has shown that this distinction should probably go to Ltn Kurt Wintgens.

Born on 1 August 1894 in Neustadt, Wintgens joined *Telegraphen-Bataillon* Nr 2 in Frankfurt/Oder as a fahnenjunker in 1913. He went to

war on the Eastern Front as a lieutenant with this unit, earning the Iron Cross 2nd Class. Wintgens eventually managed to gain a transfer to aviation, and according to a letter written on 25 March 1915, 'At first I was, as you know, an observer in August and September'.

He was returned to his telegraph duties because of a shortage of officers, and stayed with the Army Wireless *Abteilung* of AOK IX until February 1915. However, by March Wintgens was back in the flying troops training as a pilot in the Fokker School in Schwerin. Here, he became a skilled exponent of the rotary-engined monoplanes, writing on 13 May 1915;

'I would like to fly in the field the smallest and fastest Fokker type with the Garros-installation, which enabled a built-in machine gun to fire through the propeller.'

His wish was granted, for on 2 July he recorded;

'During my voyage to Mülhausen I was given a different destination, and for the time being am with the Bavarian (*Feldflieger*) *Abteilung* 6b (at Bühl airfield, near Saarburg). In Mannheim I had tested the machine and then from Strassburg by air to the Front, where lately a Parasol fighter-monoplane *à la* Garros had made itself felt.

'I had flown to the Front a couple of times without seeing an opponent, until yesterday evening when the big moment came. Time – 1800 hrs. Place – east of Lunéville. Altitude – between 2000 and 2500 metres. Suddenly I notice a monoplane in front of me, about 300 metres higher than I. In the next moment he dived down on me, firing his machine gun intensely. But as I, at once, dived in the opposite direction under him, he missed wildly. After four attacks I reached his altitude in a large turn, and now my machine gun did some talking. I attacked at such a close distance that we looked each other in the face.

'After my third attack he did the most stupid thing that he could do – he fled. I turned the crate and had him in my sights at once, beautifully. Rapid fire for about four seconds, and down went his nose. I could follow him until 500 metres, then, unfortunately, I was fired upon from the ground too hotly, the fight having taken place far over the French lines.'

Wintgens had successfully blooded his Fokker E I 5/15, but the combat took place so far over the lines that he failed to receive official confirmation for this historic victory. The French crew of Capitaine Paul du Peuty and Sous-Lt de Boutiny of MS48, however, were both wounded and forced down in their Morane L at 1800 hrs.

In spite of Wintgens' mention of a machine gun, the French crew was reportedly armed with a carbine and reported they had been attacked by a monoplane – they were commended for successfully



Kurt Wintgens is seen running up the 80 hp Oberursel of his E I 5/15 almost certainly whilst serving with Bavarian FFA 6 in July 1915. This aircraft retains the high shoulder-mounted wing and a Parabellum gun, and had a headrest to steady the pilot's head while aiming. It seems highly likely that Wintgens used this aircraft to obtain an unconfirmed victory over a French Morane on 1 July 1915



landing their aircraft, which had been 'completely devastated' with 200 bullet holes. Wintgens claimed another Morane Parasol on 4 July, but this also went unconfirmed.

By 15 July Wintgens and his Fokker had been temporarily posted to FFA 48 at Mülhausen, in the German *Armee Abteilung* Gaede, where French Morane pilots such as Eugene Gilbert and Adolphe Pegoud had been inflicting significant losses on German airmen. On 15 July Wintgens finally received confirmation for his first official victory – another Morane Parasol at Schlucht. Since he was almost certainly flying E I 5/15, it would seem that he was actually the first pilot to score in a Fokker monoplane.

By the end of July some 15 Fokker Eindeckers were recorded as operational on the Western Front. In all cases they were attached to the two-seater *Abteilungen*, with only one fighter assigned per unit. They were flown by pilots who still had to perform their reconnaissance work, in addition to occasionally flying monoplane sorties to intercept Allied aircraft. These Eindecker pilots were forbidden to cross the lines into enemy territory in an attempt to safeguard the secret of the synchronised gun.

BOELCKE AND IMMELMANN

Wintgens' achievements, significant as they were, did not receive as much notoriety as those of Oswald Boelcke and Max Immelmann of FFA 62. Their story is inextricably linked to the Fokker Eindecker legend.

Boelcke was born on 19 May 1891 in the town of Giebichenstein, a suburb of Halle an der Saale, in Prussian territory. His father was a professor who was rector at the German Lutheran school – his first teaching job was in Argentina (Oswald's three older siblings had been born in Buenos Aires).

The duchy of Anhalt was not far from Giebichenstein, and the Boelcke family moved to its capital of Dessau when Oswald was very young. As a youth he contracted whooping cough, but built up his

Wintgens and his E I 5/15 were temporarily transferred to FFA 48 at Mülhausen in mid-July. Whilst with that unit the Fokker was painted with a black rudder and black and white fuselage bands – markings that were applied to most aircraft in *Armee Abteilung* Gaede. Later, Wintgens returned to Bavarian FFA 6 at Bühl airfield, by Saarburg, where this photograph was taken



An informal portrait of the legendary Oswald Boelcke, who received the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class for his work as a two-seater pilot. By July 1915 Boelcke had been transferred to FFA 62, where he flew Fokker E 13/15. Boelcke would attain an unprecedented 40 victories before his death on 28 October 1916

A very confident and relaxed Oblt Max Immelmann poses for the first of the famous Sanke postcards that would make his face as familiar as his name. Immelmann initiated a rivalry with Boelcke by scoring the first Fokker victory for FFA 62 on 1 August 1915



stamina by sports, although he remained an asthmatic his entire life. He was accepted as a fahnenjunker (officer cadet) in *Telegraphen-Bataillon Nr 3* in Koblenz in March of 1911, and received a Prussian commission a year later. His older brother Wilhelm had transferred into aviation, and Oswald followed his example. By June of 1914, with war clouds looming, he began his pilot training at the Halberstadt Aeroplane Works.

For his first combat assignment, his brother (now a hauptmann) managed to have Oswald posted to his own FFA 13. Together, the two brothers formed a dedicated and accomplished reconnaissance team, resulting in the Iron Cross First Class for Wilhelm on 24 October 1914 and the same for Oswald three months later. On 25 April 1915 Oswald found himself at Döberitz field, outside of Berlin, attached to the newly formed FFA 62, under the command of the experienced pre-war flier Hptm Hermann Kastner. Among the other pilots Boelcke met there was 24-year-old Fähnrich Max Immelmann.

Immelmann was thoroughly a Saxon, having been born in Dresden on 21 September 1890. He began his military service in *Eisenbahn-Regiment Nr 2* in 1911, hoping to gain a Royal Saxon Army commission. He left the Army in March of the following year to study mechanical engineering in Dresden, but returned to the military as a Reserve officer candidate when the war broke out, being assigned to *Eisenbahn-Regt Nr 1*.

Immelmann soon transferred to aviation, however, and joined FFA 2 (*Flieger-Ersatz-Abteilung*, or aviation replacement detachment) at Adlershof. He qualified as a pilot at Johannisthal and was posted to AFP 3 (*Armee Flugpark*, an aviation supply depot) at Reims, in France. From there Immelmann went to FFA 10 at Vrigny, where he flew an LVG B I on reconnaissance and artillery-ranging missions with his observer Lt Bismeyer. Immelmann made such an impression he was soon posted to FFA 62.

On 13 May 1915 the new unit left Döberitz for the front, setting up shop at Pont Faverger airfield, near Douai. In the weeks that followed, both Anthony Fokker and Otto Parschau demonstrated the new Fokker E I for the FFA 62 airmen.

On 4 July, Lt Boelcke was flying one of the first armed Albatros C I types with observer Lt Heinz-Hellmuth von Wühlisch. They sighted a Morane two-seater, and after almost 30 minutes of manoeuvring, they were in position. Boelcke wrote to his parents;

'As soon as we were close enough my observer started to pepper him with the machine gun. He defended himself as well as he could, but we were always the aggressor, he having to protect himself. We were higher and faster. He below us and slower, so that he could not escape. I always stuck close to him so that my observer could fire at close range.'

After another 20 minutes of skilful flying and shooting, the French aircraft fell into a forest behind the German lines. Boelcke landed to discover that both crewmen of MS15 were dead. In a letter of 16 July, Boelcke wrote with typical modesty;

'Father asks if it will be all right to publish my report in the newspapers. I do not care much for newspaper publicity, and I do not

think that my report is written in a style suitable for newspapers. But if the publication of the report will bring you any joy, I will not be against it.'

The victory brought the Iron Cross 1st Class for Wühlisch and the promise of the unit's first Eindecker to Boelcke.

After the arrival of E 3/15, Boelcke flew the aircraft at every chance, but still carried out his reconnaissance duties. Immelmann was eager to learn to fly the new monoplane as well, and practised in an unarmed Fokker, probably an M 5L. On 17 July, Immelmann wrote;

'I told you in my last letter that *Direktor* Fokker demonstrated one of the single-seat fighters built in his factory. He is one of the oldest and best airmen. I am very much in his good books, not only for my flying, but for my mode of life as well, because I do not smoke or drink, and always go to bed early. I never stay in the mess after 10 pm.'

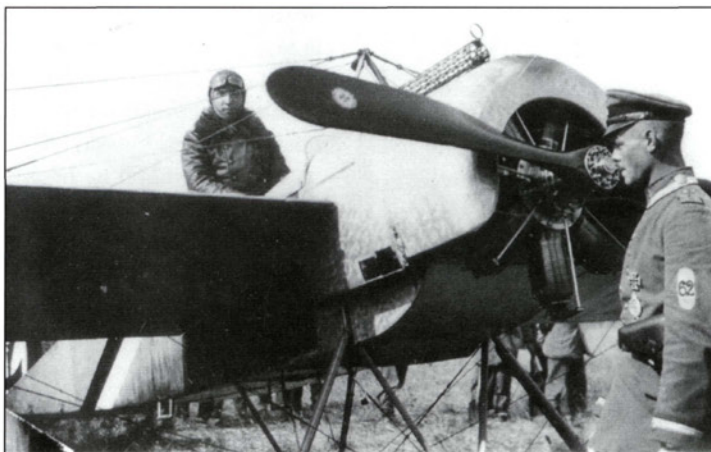
Immelmann took up a second armed machine (likely the 80 hp E 13/15) for some flights, and practised shooting at a ground target, on 31 July. Then came the eventful first day of August.

At 0545 hrs German time, the FFA 62 airmen were awakened by BE 2c aircraft from No 2 Sqn RFC bombing their airfield. Boelcke soon took off in E 3/15 to drive off the enemy. Immelmann wrote that, 'Since I am not a lazy man' he too was soon airborne in E 13/15;

'I was up to 2400 metres by the time I was almost over Douai, and then I saw two other opponents and Boelcke. They were 3200 metres up, all three heading for Arras. Suddenly I saw Boelcke go into a steep dive. As I learnt later, he had a bad stoppage, so that he could not fire another shot.

'I was about halfway between Douai and Arras when I caught sight of a third machine a long way ahead of me. Then I saw him drop bombs on Vitry. It was plain that he must be an enemy. I climbed a bit and made for him. I was about 80-100 metres above him when, 50 metres away, I saw the huge French markings quite clearly – blue, white and red rings (the aircraft was, of course, British – author).

'The two others were now heading for me, and they were still high above me. So I had to act quickly. I dove on him like a hawk



Immelmann is ready for flight in his E 1 at the field of FFA 62 – note the arm patch of the airman at right. The black and white diagonal band was applied to several FFA 62 machines. The Fokker seen here is very likely E 13/15 in which Immelmann achieved his first victories

A less familiar view of Immelmann's E 1 reveals the LMG 08 machine gun. The cowling was fitted with a blast plate below the muzzle of the gun for protection from blast debris, and the staining seen there proves the weapon has seen use. Note the opaque appearance of the fabric, even in strong sunlight. The propeller displays the trademark of the Garuda firm



and fired my machine gun. For a moment I thought I was going to fly right into him. I had a gun stoppage when I had fired about 60 shots – that was most unpleasant, because I needed both hands to remove it, which meant I had to go on flying without handling the controls. Meanwhile, the enemy was making for Arras. I flew alongside him and cut off his line of retreat by forcing him into a left-hand turn, which put his machine in the direction of Douai.’

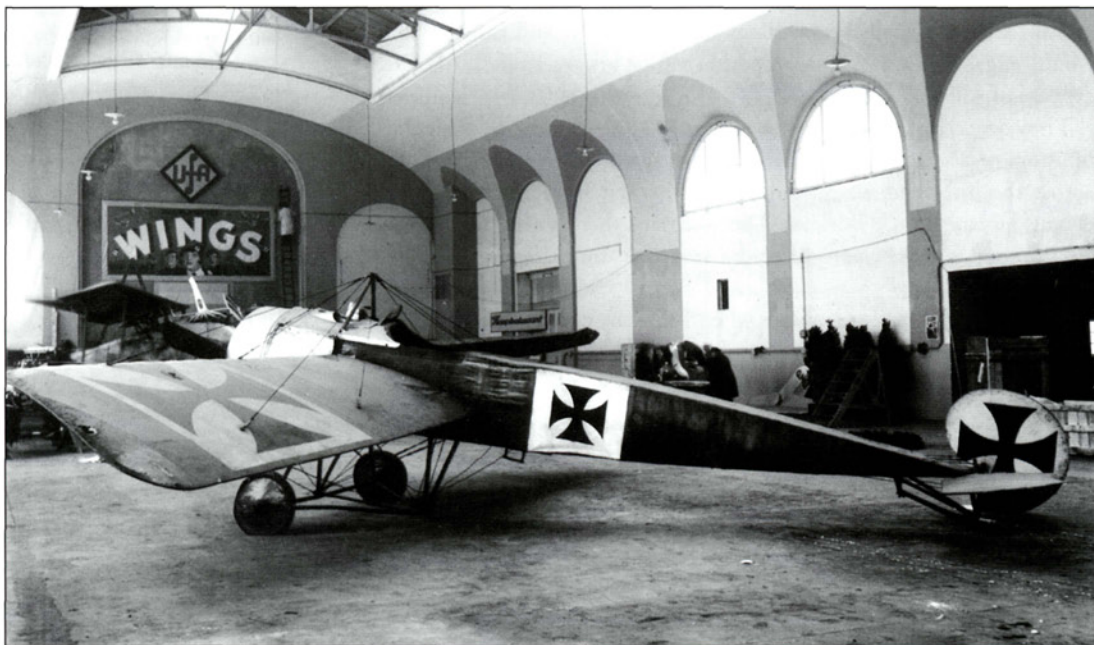
After eight to ten minutes of manoeuvring and over 450 shots, Immelmann saw the BE 2c go down in a steep glide, which was fortunate because his machine gun had finally jammed completely. The British pilot brought his machine down safely and Immelmann landed nearby. Marching up to the BE 2c, he somewhat hopefully shouted ‘*Prisonniers!*’ (he was unarmed). He was relieved to discover that there was but one occupant in the machine, who held up his only uninjured hand in surrender. Upon discovering his opponent (Canadian Lt William Reid) was not French, Immelmann said in basic English, ‘You are my prisoner’, to which Reid responded, ‘My arm is broken – you shot very well’.

Reid had put up a valiant struggle, flying the BE 2c with his left hand and trying to defend himself with an automatic pistol in his right. Immelmann’s bursts had broken his left arm in four places, and stopped his engine as well. The German helped Reid out of the riddled machine, laid him on the grass and cut away the sleeves of his flying coat, uniform and shirt. Reid was subsequently taken to Douai hospital, and he would be repatriated to Switzerland in 1916, finally reaching Britain in March 1918. Immelmann later flew an LVG over St Pol and dropped a letter to the RFC informing them of Reid’s fate.

A jubilant Immelmann wrote to Anthony Fokker;

‘I believe that I am the first who has brought down an enemy with one of your machines. Furthermore, I am without doubt the youngest

Immelmann was quite pleased when his E I 13/15 was selected for preservation and display back in the Fatherland. It is seen here without armament in the Saxon Army Museum in Dresden, circa 1928. It seems the aircraft was considerably refurbished, and the fuselage was either repainted or re-covered and national insignia applied. In the background is a Halberstadt D III, as well as a poster for the 1927 American film *Wings*. Both of these aircraft were destroyed in the bombing of Dresden in World War 2



Fokker flier. You can imagine that I was overjoyed by my success, especially as I received the Iron Cross 1st Class. Hopefully this will not be the last victory that I will achieve in your machine.

'I would rather have a 100 hp machine. Would this not be possible? I believe with your kind support it would be realisable. I cannot reach 2000 metres faster than 15 minutes – with the 100 hp machine it is surely attainable in 10-12 minutes.'

A jammed gun had robbed Boelcke of the chance to be the first *FFA* 62 pilot to down a hostile aircraft with the new Fokker, and Immelmann (rightly or wrongly) became widely recognised as the 'first' Eindecker pilot to successfully claim a victory.

Boelcke was eager to attain his own success in the Fokker, and this came to pass 19 days after Immelmann's victory. He attacked what he called a 'Bristol biplane', but which was most likely a BE 2c (aircraft identification was pretty poor on both sides at this early period, and there may have been a mistaken belief that the 'B' in BE 2c stood for Bristol). At any rate, Boelcke wrote;

'When I was out on my usual evening flight for the purpose of chasing French artillery fliers away, I found lively traffic in the air. First I got to grips with an English Bristol Biplane. He apparently began by mistaking me for a Frenchman – at any rate, he came flying towards me in a comfortable way that my opponents are not generally accustomed to do. But when he saw me shoot, he made off quickly. I followed hard behind and gave him a few shots. I must have hit either him or his machine, for he suddenly cut his engine and vanished in the depths. As our fight was over the lines, he unfortunately succeeded in landing on his own side – in the enemy artillery positions.'

The only corresponding record from the RFC notes that a BE 2c from No 2 Sqn had a combat with a German machine on this day, and its crew was forced to land near Arras with a severed fuel pipe. Nonetheless, Boelcke received full credit for his first Fokker victory, and his second overall. From this point on, Boelcke and Immelmann would engage in a scoring competition (not always friendly) at the expense of Allied airmen.

They were both out on the evening (their favourite time for hunting) of 26 August. They had already chased hostile machines back across the lines and were heading home when Immelmann saw an enemy biplane attack Boelcke. The Germans then both attacked the aircraft, but Boelcke again suffered a stoppage. Immelmann fired 300 rounds;

'I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the enemy airman throw up both his arms. His crash helmet fell out and he went down in wide circles, and a second later the machine plunged headlong into the depths from 2200 metres.'

Although the aeroplane went down on the other side of the lines, Immelmann was credited with his second official victory.

Two days later Boelcke earned a unique medal. The mess of *FFA* 62 faced a local canal, and he had often enjoyed rowing on it – he had also noted the many local Frenchmen fishing there. That day Boelcke saw a boy (14-year-old Albert Deplace) climb over the railings with his fishing gear and suddenly fall into the canal. Boelcke immediately ran

to the spot and, 'not having much time for reflection, I took a header and dived in'.

After some searching he found the boy drowning and managed to bring him to the surface. Boelcke's comrade von Teubern rowed out to them, and Boelcke swam to the boat with the boy hanging around his neck. After giving the boy a 'good spanking', the Germans released him into the custody of his grateful mother. All the local civilians who had quickly gathered gave the drenched Boelcke an ovation – he wrote that he was in full uniform and 'stood there like a dripping poodle'.

He paid a visit to the boy's parents the next day, and they wanted to try to get him the French Legion of Honour, which Boelcke thought would be a good joke. Instead, Kastner proposed him for the Prussian Lifesaving Medal – Boelcke would receive this award on 11 December.

On 8 September 1915 Boelcke recorded that he had made a trip to collect a new Fokker in place of his old one, which had already been sent away. He duly returned with the 100 hp E II 37/15 – 'it is much faster and climbs more easily'. However, Immelmann was photographed with 37/15, and it seems both pilots flew it when available.

The very next day – 9 September – both airmen were again aloft in the evening, and they tangled with two French machines. While Immelmann was busy attacking a Farman, he was in turn pursued by a 'Morane-Saulnier biplane' which Boelcke set upon;

'When the Morane saw me coming up, he turned around to meet me. I peppered his nose a bit, so that he got in a funk and turned back. That was his greatest mistake. I sat on his neck.'

Boelcke sent the two-seater down near Souchez, and the victory was confirmed by Immelmann. On 21 September Immelmann celebrated his birthday, and caught up to Boelcke by destroying a BE 2c from No 10 Sqn. Once again he was able to land near his crashed enemy – the observer, Lt W Sugden-Wilson, was slightly injured and taken prisoner, but his pilot, 2Lt S W Caws, was dead.

ACTION WITH FFA 23

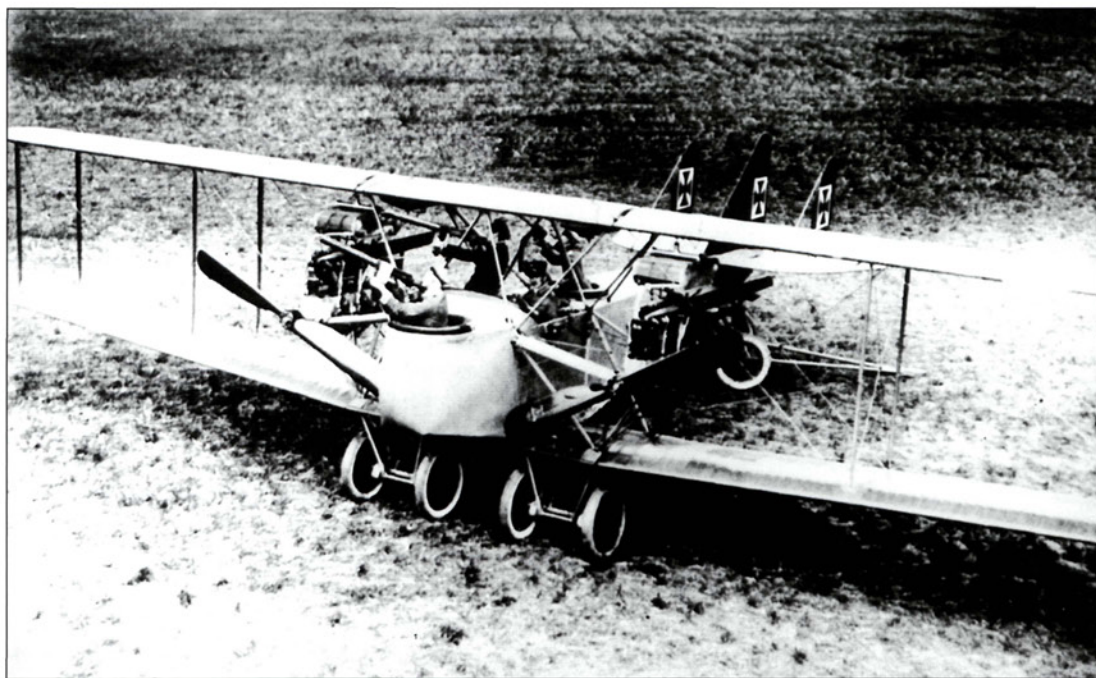
By this time Fokker pilots in other units were also beginning to make their presence felt. *Feldflieger Abteilung 23*, commanded by Hauptmann Seber at Roupy, was one such notable formation. From

its ranks no less than three redoubtable Eindecker exponents – and future *Pour le Mérite* aces – would emerge. These were Hans-Joachim Buddecke, Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus and the fiercely aggressive Rudolf Berthold.

Buddecke was born in Berlin on 22 August 1890, the son of a career army officer. In 1910 he was commissioned in the *Leibgarde-Infanterie-Regiment* (1. *Grossherzoglich Hessisches*) Nr 115. He left the service in 1913 and travelled to Indianapolis

Hans-Joachim Buddecke of FFA 23 prepares for a sortie in his Fokker Eindecker. The groundcrewmen are priming the cylinders of the Oberursel motor with fuel from an oil can in preparation for starting the engine. Buddecke earned early fame as a Fokker ace, claiming his first victory on 19 September 1915





in the USA to live with an uncle. Buddecke found work in the burgeoning auto manufacturing business, but deeply wanted to start an aircraft manufacturing company. Having purchased a Nieuport monoplane, he taught himself to fly. However, the coming of the war in Europe abruptly ended his plans. Buddecke returned to the Fatherland under a French name on a Greek merchant ship and soon joined the *Fliegertruppe*.

By September 1915 he was a pilot with FFA 23 along with his good friend Berthold. When the detachment's first Fokker arrived, Berthold suggested that Buddecke – having experience on a monoplane in America – should fly it. Berthold himself had taken over AEG G II 21/15, a large four-seat 'battle plane' which offered an alternate approach to aerial combat. Supporters of this concept felt that these mammoth aircraft, with as many as three machine guns, could emerge as the best offensive air weapons. Berthold wrote off his first AEG in a bad landing on 15 September, but soon received a replacement. The AEG and the Fokker formed a small *Kampfstaffel* of the *Abteilung*, being based at Château Vaux in order to intercept British reconnaissance aircraft.

On 19 September Buddecke succeeded in drawing first blood for FFA 23 in his light and agile Fokker. Buddecke wrote that he and his comrades could hardly believe that Boelcke and Immelmann had already shot down three adversaries, and that 'details as to the tactics of fighting, no one knew. One could not imagine them either. Always it was said, "just go hard at them – the rest will follow"'.

Buddecke was at an altitude of 2000 metres south of St Quentin when he sighted a yellow-brown 'something', which slowly materialised into a BE 2c from No 8 Sqn, crewed by pilot Lt W H Nixon and observer Capt J N S Stott. Buddecke excitedly dived on the

An alternate approach to air combat is exemplified by AEG G II 26/15 of FFA 23. One school of thought favoured the large twin-engined *Kampfflugzeug* approach, relying on the three machine guns manned by a crew of four. The pilot underneath the top wing, looking at the camera, is Lt Rudolf Berthold, whose gunners are practising aiming at imagined foes. Berthold had already destroyed his first AEG (G II 21/15) in a poor landing on 15 September. Further bad experiences with this second AEG convinced the aggressive Berthold that the Fokkers offered better chances for success (HAC/UTD)

Right

Ernst Freiherr von Althaus was another early Eindecker pilot with FFA 23. Here, he poses with his Fokker E I. The starboard side of the cowlings has been enlarged to enclose the ammunition container which was mounted on that side of the fuselage – this feature was never seen on the port side, and is found only on some early E I and E II machines. The distinctive fuselage cross is of a style occasionally painted on other early Fokkers

two-seater, as he wrote in his book *El Schahin (der Jagdfalke)*, here translated by Harry van Dorssen;

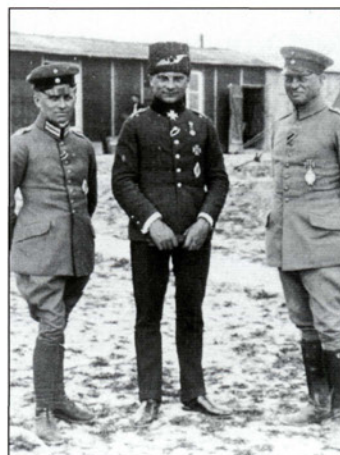
'I arrived 200 metres behind him at his altitude. I sat in my crate, took aim at the silhouette in front of me and fired. "Tac-tac, tac-tac". That calmed me down. I was thinking hard – distance? A bit closer and a bit more to the left. In the other machine they answered diligently.

'Stott was not a bad marksman. However, after a few rounds one of my bullets hit the mechanism of his machine gun and put it out of order. He drew his pistol from his pocket and fired nine shots. The whistling continued around him. When he tried to reload, it was shot out of his hand – his enemy had closed in to ten metres. Stott then noticed Nixon's head fall forwards, and saw how the machine glided forward and went down. Then he pulled all his strength together, swung himself like a horseman on the shoulders of his dying comrade, pressing his heels on his pilot's knees in order to move the pedals, and wrested the controls away from his stiffening hands.'

Buddecke was certain his opponent was doomed, until the wind took hold of the leather tip of his Spandau gun's cartridge belt and tore it out into the slipstream, causing a jam. The furious Berliner broke off the combat until he could clear the stoppage, then took up his former position behind the BE 2c. He hoped the courageous observer could be brought down alive, but when the aircraft made a break for it Buddecke was forced to take aim at Stott's flapping yellow leather coat and open fire. The BE 2c came down near St Quentin, the daring Capt Stott surviving as a PoW, but Nixon was dead. Buddecke drove to the spot and spoke with Stott, who good-naturedly showed him his well-holed flying coat and said, 'You are some shot'.

On 2 October Berthold flew his second AEG *Kampfflugzeug* into combat with a British pusher, and had his faith in the 'battle plane' concept badly shaken. His opponent escaped and the AEG just made it back with two mortally wounded gunners. Berthold later happily took over Buddecke's E I when the latter was transferred to Turkey.

At about this time the little detachment's Fokker complement was doubled when von Althaus arrived with another Eindecker. Born on 19 March 1890 in Koburg, Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus joined the 1st Saxon *Husaren-Regiment Nr 18* in Grossenhain in 1909, and went to war as a lieutenant with that unit. He rendered distinguished service, earning the Knight's Cross of the Military St Henry Order for an action in which he led a patrol of 15 hussars into a French village, engaged a superior force and returned with 22 prisoners. In the spring of 1915 he transferred to aviation and trained at FEA 6 at Grossenhain. Von Althaus' Fokker was housed in a large wooden hangar on the grounds of the



Hans-Joachim Buddecke was the first Fokker pilot of FFA 23, and he downed three adversaries during his time with the unit. In late 1915 he was transferred to the Dardanelles as a member of the German Military Mission to Turkey, where he would go on to even greater feats. Buddecke (centre) is seen here back on the Western Front, wearing the exotic uniform of a Turkish *hauptmann* (German officers who volunteered for service in Turkey were advanced one grade in rank in Ottoman service). To Buddecke's left is Hptm von Gersdorff and to his right Hptm Julius Schulz



chateau, along with Berthold's AEG and Buddecke's Eindecker.

Buddecke attained his second victory on 23 October when he destroyed a BE 2c from No 13 Sqn. Locating the two-seater from the anti-aircraft shells bursting near Ham, he closed in;

'At 50 metres I pushed my head forward to take aim, the eye firmly in the sight. Then the black barrel in front of me began to hammer, until I believed that my propeller was about to crash into the tail of the enemy. I made my turn and dove again at him.'

After repeating this several times, Buddecke noticed that the BE 2c was losing height and not defending itself. He duly pulled up close enough to 'smell him'. 'The BE type had a special smell', wrote Buddecke. 'The gases of the engine left a trail that seemed sweeter than a small ladies' handkerchief to the air fighter!' Suddenly another Fokker, flown by von Althaus, dived down on the hapless BE 2c – it crashed near Roupv, with 212 hits. The crew of Capt C H Marks and 2Lt W G Lawrence (the brother of T E Lawrence, of Arabian fame) were both killed.

THE PACE QUICKENS

As recorded by Buddecke, very few tactics had yet been developed, as these embryo fighter pilots were inventing the art of aerial stalking and attack as they learned. Two-seater pilots selected for Eindecker duty had previously been sent to the Fokker Company's school at Schwerin to learn the intricacies of flying a rotary-engined monoplane. In August 1915, a second unit was formed at Mannheim for similar purposes. It was entitled *Kampfeinsitzer Abteilung 1*, and was soon turning out a steady stream of fighter pilots.

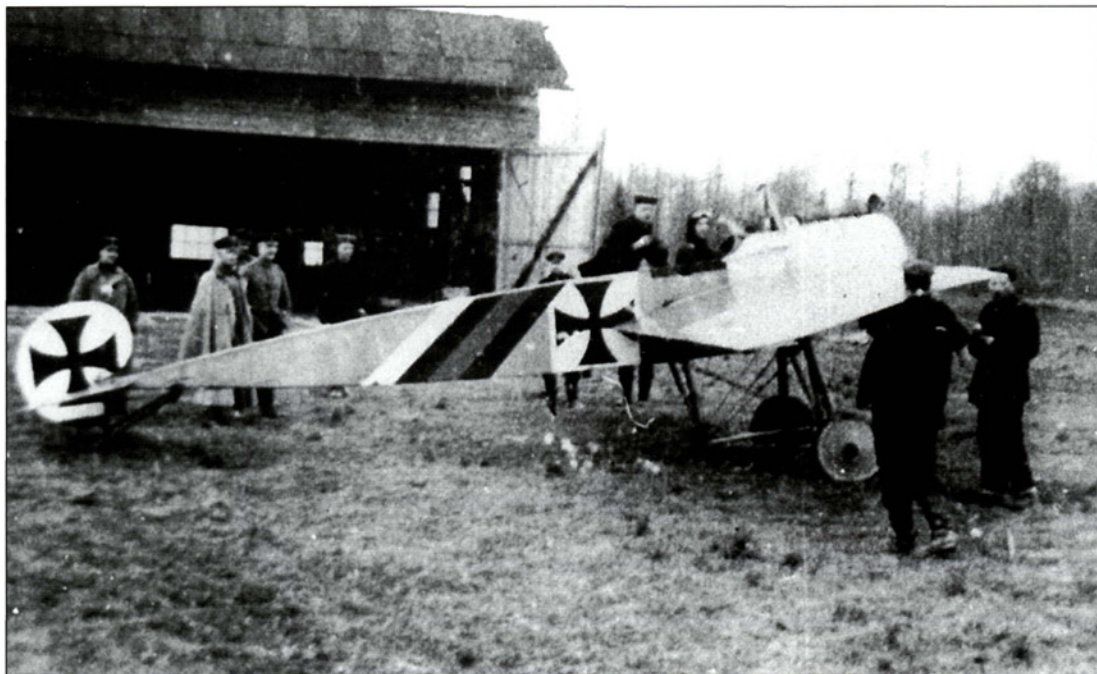
One such eager young airman was 22-year-old Lt n Kurt von Crailsheim of FFA 53. Having been wounded in the leg during infantry service in August 1914, he was deemed unfit for further service as a foot soldier and so transferred to aviation. After flight training, Crailsheim was posted to the *Abteilung* at Monthois on 22 June 1915. He took single-seater training at Mannheim, and by mid-September was back flying the Fokker Eindecker with his unit.

Crailsheim wrote that he was attached to a special Fokker battle group in Monthois with five other



Von Althaus and his E I now appear ready for a sortie as mechanics hold up the tail. The fuselage cross on the port side has either been deteriorated by oil-laden exhaust fumes, or possibly the photo has been retouched for some unknown reason. The dark and opaque appearance of the fuselage fabric is noteworthy





pilots. On 22 September he 'shot one down in flames with my Fokker' and gained official confirmation, although it fell behind French lines.

Crailsheim destroyed his first Fokker in a forced landing on 2 October, but eight days later he wrote, 'Today I received and flew my 100 hp Fokker (E II 69/15) and tomorrow I will fly it against the enemy'. He was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class for his victory on Christmas Eve, but on 30 December he suffered a severe crash in his E II. Five days later he succumbed to his injuries in the field hospital of the 50th Infantry Division.

Increasing numbers of German pilots were gaining experience on the Fokker monoplanes, and one of these was Offz-Stv Willy Rosenstein of FFA 19. A pre-war pilot of immense experience, Rosenstein travelled from his airfield at Porcher to the Fokker factory to pick up E I 43/15 – his unit's first Eindecker. He logged in excess of 25 hours in testing his new machine before returning to Porcher on 6 September. Rosenstein completed 23 combat flights in this aircraft in September and October, totalling 19 hours and 35 minutes of flight time.

He first attacked an Allied aircraft on 10 September, but made no claim for it, even though he expended 220 rounds in the fight. Rosenstein reported another inconclusive air battle three days later, and on the 20th had an indecisive combat near Moulotte. At some point his faithful E I 43/15 was crashed by a fellow pilot named Gefr Schnürz, and Rosenstein switched to a new Pfalz E I 215/15. Although he scored no accredited claims as an *Eindeckerflieger*, Rosenstein would go on to finish the war with at least eight victories as a member of *Jagdstaffeln* 27, 40s and *Kest* 1a.

The intensifying pace of aerial warfare was demonstrated on 25 September, when a German pilot achieved the unprecedented feat of downing *two* aircraft in a single mission. Vfw Eduard Böhme (no

Above

This is thought to be Kurt *Freiherr* von Crailsheim's replacement E II, which he received after writing off E II 69/15. The fuselage stripes are in the same format as those applied to 69/15, and the national insignia has been painted in an unusual forward position. This is believed to be the aircraft that von Crailsheim crashed in on 30 December 1915 – he died five days later (HAC/UTD)

Left

Ltn Kurt *Freiherr* von Crailsheim of FFA 53 is perched on the cockpit of his first Fokker E II, 69/15, as he chats with an unidentified observer on Monthois airfield. This Fokker was shipped from the factory on 24 September 1915, and bore the Wk-Nr 320. The leading two fuselage stripes just *may* have been the black and yellow colours of the ribbon of the Württemberg Gold Military Merit Medal (which von Crailsheim received on 20 September), while the trailing two stripes were Prussian black and white. Von Crailsheim is thought to have scored his sole victory in this machine on 22 September, then destroyed it in early October during a forced landing (HAC/UTD)



relation to the ace Erwin Böhme) was a Saxon pilot in the Bavarian *Feldflieger Abteilung 9*. He had flown Pfalz Parasols during the unit's brief tenure as the air arm of the German Alpine Corps in the Dolomites, and he had been a participant in the famous bombing raid to Cortina d'Ampezzo (see *Aircraft of the Aces 71 - Pfalz Scout Aces of World War 1* for further details).

In August 1915 Böhme's unit returned to the Western Front at Colmar-North airfield as part of *Armee-Abteilung-Gaede*. After single-seater training at Mannheim, Böhme began flying Fokkers in the *Kampfeindecker-Halbabteilung* (half-section of fighter monoplanes) attached to FFA 9b.

On the 25th a group of three Maurice Farman 11 bombers of *escadrille* MF29 were heading toward the town of Rottweil, northeast of Freiburg. Along with other pilots from the area, Böhme scrambled at 0727 hrs in his Fokker E I 14/15, loaded with 700 cartridges. He

Above

Vfw Eduard Böhme achieved the impressive feat of gaining two victories in this Fokker E I 14/15 on 25 September 1915. He then landed near the second Farman he downed, only to destroy his landing gear, as seen here. Böhme was a member of the *Kampfeindecker Halbabteilung* attached to FFA 9b at the time. The black/white bands on the fuselage were typical markings applied to aircraft in *Armee Abteilung Gaede* in 1915 (R Kastner)

Right

Warmly bundled for the winter of 1915/16, Oswald Boelcke is seen with a Fokker E II or E III. Boelcke's fame brought him many accolades, as well as meetings with royalty, generals and the media. He was even interviewed by an American journalist in September 1916, who wrote, 'Boelcke stood about five feet seven, clean-shaven and red-cheeked, with grey-blue eyes that never left the questioner. He had a thin Roman nose, a soft voice and rather quick enunciation'

Left

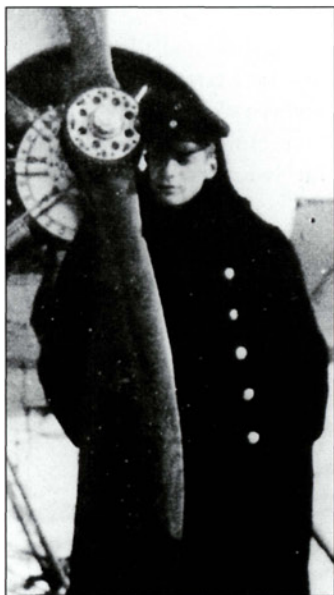
An evocative view of Eduard Böhme assisting his armourer in loading the ammunition box for his LMG 08. The hemp ammunition belt held 550 rounds. On 24 January 1916 Böhme suffered fatal injuries in the crash of this aircraft (or one marked exactly like it) near Ensisheim airfield, in Alsace (R Kastner)





Above

A happy Eduard Böhme is seen with his favourite stocking cap as he alights from another Fokker. Although exhaust fumes and castor oil have nearly obliterated the serial number, this aircraft is believed to be 33/15. This aircraft was also photographed with fellow FFA 9b pilot Otto Kissenberth. The machine displayed the black/white banded markings of *Armee Abteilung Gaede* in a vertical format, and it also had a black rudder (R Kastner)



caught up with the Farmans over Elzach, in the Black Forest, at 3000 metres. He attacked one after another 'from such close distance that my machine was shaken by the wash of the enemy's propeller'. He first riddled the nacelle of Farman 450, killing the pilot Lt Devin – the gunner, *Mécanicien Vérité*, managed to grab the stick from his lifeless pilot and flew the pusher down to a crash-landing in a meadow.

Böhme was then attacked by Farman 742, as the gunner, *Mécanicien Varnet*, fired 23 shots from his Colt machine gun at the Fokker, before switching to a carbine after a jam. Böhme then turned the tables and shot up the

Farman, and the pilot, Capitaine Pigot, managed to crash-land his own machine, although Varnet was dead. As was often the case, Vfw Böhme landed his E I close to his second victory, but made a hash of the landing and wiped off his undercarriage! Nonetheless, he greeted Pigot and shook his hand.

At this early point in the war any aerial victory was noteworthy, and two in one day made Böhme the hero of the hour. He received the Iron Cross 1st Class, as well as Baden's Silver Karl Friedrich Military Medal. However, Böhme's brief career came to an end on 24 January 1916, when he crashed his Fokker E II on take-off from Ensisheim airfield and was killed.

Meanwhile, Oswald Boelcke had been suddenly transferred from FFA 62 at Douai south to Metz as a result of a French offensive that had erupted on 23 September 1915 along the Champagne Front. Various units and airmen were sent to strengthen the German 3. *Armee*, and Boelcke was transferred to *Briefstauben-Abteilung-Metz* (another so-called 'Carrier Pigeon Section', a cover name for a large unit similar to the BAO). His own Fokker had yet to arrive by the time he took off at 0845 hrs on the 25th for his first patrol, forcing him to use a borrowed machine.

Bursting flak shells drew Boelcke's attention to a flight of ten French aircraft over Metz, and he attacked the lowest machine. He felt he had scored since he saw the Farman gliding down after his fire. He was forced to break off, however, due to the 'greetings' from the other Farmans and the fact that he was over French lines. Luckily he found his way home over unfamiliar territory, and ground observers later confirmed that the Farman (from MF16) had crashed behind the enemy's barbed wire lines. Boelcke had his fourth victory.

Becoming a household name in his Fatherland, Boelcke wrote to his proud parents on 11 October, 'The *Berliner Illustrierte* (a popular magazine) will manage quite well without my photo – I beg you not to



On 26 October 1915 Immelmann forced down Vickers FB 5 'Gunbus' 5462 of No 11 Sqn and landed next to his prize near Ecooust St Mein. RFC pilot Capt C C Darley was shot in the right arm and hand, but his observer, 2Lt R J Slade, was unhurt

Immelmann is seen just after landing in his Fokker to examine his fifth victory on 26 October. This E II is thought to have been E 37/15, which was first assigned to Boelcke

send them one. I don't like all this publicity – I find quite enough articles in the papers about myself to be sick of it all'.

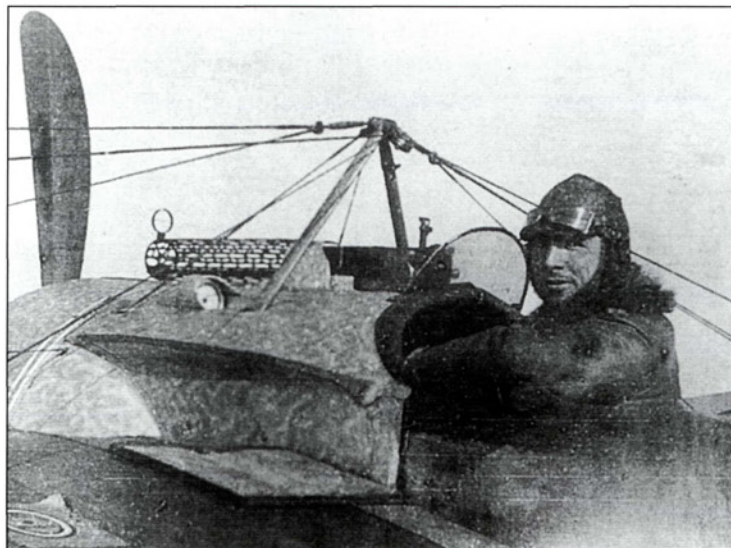
On that same day, Otto Parschau, now back with *BAO* as an Eindecker combat pilot, finally achieved his first confirmed victory by shooting down a Farman over the Champagne.

On 17 October Boelcke's star continued to ascend as he destroyed a French Voisin for his fifth, followed by another south of Tahure on the 30th. Four days earlier, his rival Immelmann had achieved his fifth confirmed claim when he shot a Vickers FB 5 'Gunbus' out of the sky over Cambrai. Capt C C Darley of No 11 Sqn suffered a bullet through his right arm, while another almost severed his thumb. 2Lt R J Slade, his observer, was unhurt as Darley landed the 'Gunbus' in a field. Once again, Immelmann landed nearby and rendered what aid he could to the wounded Darley, before the two prisoners were taken away.

On 1 November Boelcke received a telegram from Chief of the General Staff, General von Falkenhayn;

'I am delighted to inform you that His Majesty is pleased to invest you with the Knight's Cross of the House of Hohenzollern, with Swords, in recognition of your magnificent achievements against enemy airmen.'

Boelcke was the first German pilot to receive the high Prussian award, but only six days later Immelmann, too, was awarded the 'Hohenzollern' for his sixth victory. More great honours, fame and achievements lay ahead for the first fighter pilots of Imperial Germany – the heady days of the 'Fokker Scourge' were well underway.



'FOKKER SCOURGE'

By the end of October 1915, approximately 75 Fokker Eindeckers were reported in the frontline inventory. Of these, 23 were of the new E III model – this type would soon be the most numerous of all the Eindecker types. Like the E II, the E III was powered by the 100 hp Oberursel U I, and was in fact largely identical to the E II in dimensions. The E III was differentiated by being equipped with a larger main tank and an additional gravity tank that provided flight duration of 150 minutes, while the E II could only stay aloft for 90 minutes. In addition, a few examples of the Pfalz E types were just being delivered – similar in outline to the Fokkers, the Pfalz monoplanes were inferior in performance, and were therefore never as numerous or popular.

On 11 November, Oswald Boelcke was invited to visit the Fokker factory in Schwerin to examine an even newer design – the two-gun E IV, powered by its 160 hp Oberursel U III twin-row rotary engine. Originally, this design was to be equipped with a fearsome battery of *three* Spandau LMG 08 guns, but difficulties with the synchronisation of all three weapons led to a reduction to two guns.

A great deal was expected from this powerful new fighter, and extravagant rumours were already circulating at the front. In any case, the majority of E IV machines would not be delivered before April/May 1916, and they would prove disappointing in performance.

At the front, the increasing numbers of available fighters and pilots led to the grouping of several single-seaters into separate detachments based on one aerodrome. These were but one part of the changes

In November 1915, Oswald Boelcke visited the Fokker factory to get his first look at the new Fokker E IV with the 160 hp Oberursel U III. He is seen here in his own E IV, possibly one of the prototypes (likely 123/15). The fairing over the cockpit has been removed, providing a look at the twin guns that were asymmetrically mounted. This has led to speculation that this machine was originally fitted with three guns, and that the left-hand weapon has been removed





Ltn d R Gustav Leffers was a skilled and aggressive Fokker pilot with FFA 32. He would achieve at least four of his victories in E III 84/15, which he picked up on 11 November 1915

initiated by the *Chef des Feldflugwesens* (Chief of Field Aviation, or *Feldflugchef*) of the German Army, Major Hermann von der Lieth-Thomsen.

Such a semi-permanent single-seater formation was generally designated as a *Kampfeinsitzer-Kommando*, or *KEK*. While the single-seater pilots were assigned to the *KEK*, they were nonetheless still on the roster of their original *Feldflieger Abteilung*, and the single-seater formations came and went according to the changing tactical conditions. By early 1916, Fokker pilots were increasingly specialising and formulating new and better tactics.

The story of the Eindecker ace Gustav Leffers from FFA 32 is somewhat typical of this period. Born in the port city of Wilhelmshaven on 2 January 1895, Leffers seemed destined to emulate his father's career in naval engineering. Having completed his studies at Wilhelmshaven and Stettin, he joined the Holland America line as an engineer candidate. In fact, Leffers had just returned from a cruise to the USA in July 1914, with Europe heading inexorably toward war.

Leffers was first assigned to a field telegraph battalion, but his engineering know-how soon enabled his transfer to the expanding air arm. After pilot training, he was posted to FFA 32 in February 1915. His new unit was based in the northern part of the 2. *Armee* sector. Leffers' excellent performance on reconnaissance missions in LVG B types led to rapid promotion, as he rose from a lowly *gefreiter* to *leutnant der reserve* in just four months.

On 24 September Leffers was excited to learn he was to report to the single-seater school at Mannheim. He returned on 5 November, bringing the new Fokker E III 86/15 with him as his formation's first fighter. He must have been terribly chagrined when he destroyed the aircraft on landing, the machine gun operating cable having become fouled on a screw on the fuselage – lateral control was compromised, and the E III crashed as a total write-off. Leffers was unharmed, however. By 11 November he had ferried in new E III 84/15 from FFA 27, and discovered that Oblt Ernst von Althaus had been sent from FFA 23 with his Fokker on a temporary posting.

Six days later the *Abteilung* war diary recorded the intention to establish a single-seater formation in the new sheds on Bertincourt airfield by transferring both Fokkers and their associated personnel there. Although Althaus left on the 21st, this was the origin of what would eventually become *KEK Bertincourt*, which in turn would eventually form the nucleus of *Jagdstaffel 1*.

All that was in the future on 5 December, when Leffers initiated his meteoric career as a *Jagdflieger*. He took off from Vélou airfield at 1250 hrs in E III 84/15. After much fruitless patrolling, he finally sighted German flak bursts that led him directly to a British BE 2c over Martinpuich. He reported;

'I immediately took up the chase. Between Gréville and Achiet-le-Grand, I descended to 600 metres and opened fire, which was immediately returned. I was still 200 metres higher than the enemy, and headed down in a glide to within an aeroplane's length of the aircraft, firing continuously. I then noticed that the pilot had been hit and the machine had started to pitch.

‘Up until that moment, I had taken heavy machine gun fire from my opponent. Suddenly, I got a violent gust from the strong prop wash from the enemy aeroplane, which pitched my machine on its side and it sideslipped about 150 metres. However, I immediately caught it again and tried to cut off my opponent’s way to the front. But he was already in a steep glide and plunged straight down from an altitude of 300 metres, totally destroying the aeroplane. Both occupants of the British BE biplane were killed instantly.’

Leffers’ opponents were 2Lt A R H Browne and 1AM W H Cox in BE 2c 2049 of No 13 Sqn. That day the hapless RFC squadron also lost BE 2c 4092, which fell to Ernst von Althaus for his first confirmed victory. The latter pilot, now back with FFA 23, brought the aircraft down west of Roze, with fatal results for Lt G Porter and his observer 1AM H J Kirkbride. The Germans dropped a message about the BE 2c crews over the British lines, stating that ‘The pilots and observers, four, met with an honourable flying man’s death and were buried yesterday with military honours’.

Before the year was out, Leffers would double his score. On 29 December he took off in 84/15 and soon located two more BE 2cs being shelled over Bertincourt. He caught up with them and closed in;

‘Both of the aircraft, which were sticking close together, were firing at me with their four machine guns. Approaching to within 400 metres, I likewise opened fire with my machine gun at one of the enemy aeroplanes, while the other one attacked me from the side, firing with his machine gun. Having come within close range, I suddenly had a gun stoppage, but I had hit him good with my last rounds because, in that same instant, the enemy aeroplane went down in a steep spiral and crashed straight in from a height of approximately 300 metres. The pilot of the downed aeroplane was killed instantly by a shot through the heart. The observer was badly injured. The aeroplane had two machine guns with ten drums aboard.’

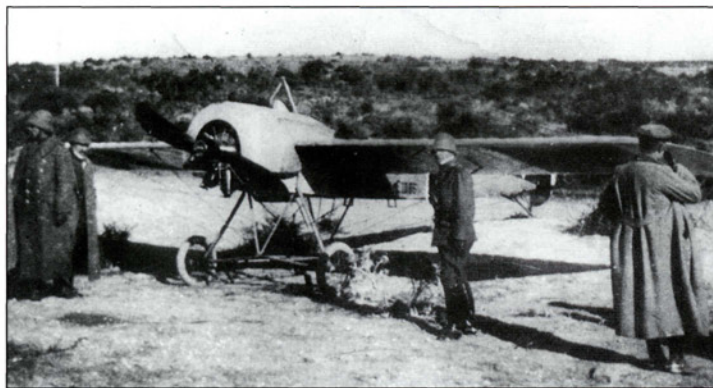
BE 2c 2039 was from No 8 Sqn, its dead pilot being 2Lt D A Glen and the captured observer Sgt E Jones.

Back on 11 November 1915, Buddecke of FFA 23 had downed yet another BE 2c for his third victory. His fame on the rise, Buddecke soon volunteered for service with the German Military Mission to Turkey and was transferred to the Dardanelles (Gallipoli). There, he was instrumental in forming the so-called *Fokker Staffel* (later

redesignated *Fliegerabteilung 6* of the Ottoman Air Service) with two Fokker E III machines and one E II.

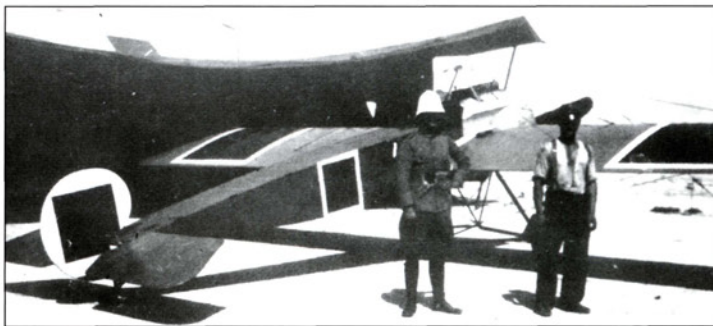
Buddecke’s presence had an almost immediate impact, and he claimed an unconfirmed victory over a Farman on 6 December. His first confirmed claim in the new theatre came on 6 January 1916, and others followed in rapid succession. According to his commander, Hptm Erich Serno,

In late 1915 Hans-Joachim Buddecke left FFA 23 for the Turkish front. He is seen here in his tropical pith helmet standing in front of the left wing of E III 96/15. The Fokker seems to have retained its original light finish at this time. The German Iron Cross emblems were painted out to produce the Turkish national insignia of black squares with white borders. In his book *El Schahin (der Jagdfalke)*, Buddecke refers to his Fokker at one point as ‘my yellow bird with the black threatening eyes’ – an interesting description



Right

Buddecke is seen again with a Fokker E III in Turkish markings. This machine has clearly been overpainted in a dark colour scheme. Buddecke's commander, Hptm Erich Serno, wrote that Buddecke achieved five confirmed victories (with six unconfirmed) over the Dardanelles between January and April 1916

**Left**

On 15 November 1915, Max Immelmann flew to Lille to put on a display of flying for his Saxon monarch, King Friedrich August III. This Sanke postcard photo was taken on that occasion, and shows Fokker E II 37/15 that Immelmann had taken over from Boelcke. To protect the secret of the synchronised machine gun, the weapon has been 'removed' by retouching – the artist obliterated the motor for good measure as well!

by 4 April Buddecke had four more confirmed successes and six unconfirmed, giving him a total of eight. Although other sources state Buddecke only had seven true victories by this time, he nonetheless would become the third German airman awarded the *Pour le Mérite* on 14 April 1916.

On the Western Front, developments had continued in FFA 62 and its associated fighter unit, *Fokker Einsitzer Kommando Douai* (or *KEK Douai*). Immelmann had flown Fokker E II 37/15 over to FFA 24's field at Lille on 15 November 1915 in order to perform a flying display for the King of Saxony, who was visiting the airfield.

With the French offensive in the Champagne repulsed, Boelcke had been transferred back to FFA 62 by 12 December in time to be presented with his Prussian Life Saving Medal. The next day, Immelmann made a forced landing in a ploughed field when the engine of his Fokker died – the aircraft was written off. On the 15th he was flying a 100 hp Fokker when he used some 200 rounds to riddle a Morane Parasol two-seater from No 3 Sqn, which crashed at Valenciennes for his seventh victory (putting him ahead

The twisted remains of Immelmann's seventh victim had been delivered to Valenciennes from the crash site north of the city for this photograph. The aircraft was Morane Parasol LA 5087, and the date was 15 December 1915. 2Lts A V Hobbs (pilot) and C E G Tudor-Jones of No 3 Sqn were killed



of Boelcke). Again, both RFC crew members perished.

On 20 December Immelmann noted in a letter that 'Boelcke has got a 160 hp Fokker', and the next day Boelcke wrote home complaining of mechanical problems with the E IV due to the groundcrews' unfamiliarity with it.

1916 ARRIVES

As 1916 opened, the wintry weather hampered flying on both sides of the lines until 5 January, which turned out to be a very active day for FFA 62. Two BE 2cs from No 2 Sqn were on a reconnaissance flight to Lille, and Boelcke, eager for his seventh victory that would tie him with Immelmann, took off at 0900 hrs (probably in his two-gun E IV) and caught up with them over Henin-Liétard. He closed in on the rear machine, which was flying escort for the other one. 'There, some joyous shooting began'.

Boelcke fired some 800 rounds during the course of his pursuit, wounding the observer Lt G C Formilli in the shoulder and grazing the right side of the head of the pilot, 2Lt W E Somervill. The rudder control and one of the aileron control cables were also shot away. Somervill tried to land the crippled BE 2c near Harnes, but the aircraft crashed badly. He helped his wounded observer from the wreckage, but could not burn the aeroplane before German troops arrived.

Boelcke landed nearby, and had a long talk with Somervill – the next day Boelcke took some English newspapers and a photo of the BE 2c to Formilli in the hospital. As he chatted with Boelcke, Somervill told him 'We know all about you'!

The day was far from over. Only two hours later, Boelcke was dining in Douai when more BE 2cs from No 2 Sqn flew over the airfield, dropping bombs. He rushed back to the aerodrome, only to find all of the mechanics had taken cover in the dugouts;

'I bellowed like a bull until at last one came out. Unfortunately, Immelmann, who stayed on the aerodrome over lunch time, had taken off in my new 160 hp Fokker – he could not get the hang of its (fuel) petcocks – so that I was left with an old 80 hp reserve machine. Consequently, I could not overhaul the enemy squadron, but only got near a single machine that lagged behind the others. But this was already picked off by another Fokker – our Lt n Hess. The two of them were doing gymnastics all round each other.

'To help out a bit, I dived on the Englishman and put about 150 rounds into his machine. Then the fellow saw he could not do anything against the two of us and preferred to make a quick



Four days after Immelmann's seventh victory, Otto Parschau of BAO (seen standing at the extreme right in this group) wrapped up the year by downing BE 2c 2074 for his second confirmed claim. The No 12 Squadron airmen fell at Oostkampe, in Belgium. Lts N Gordon Smith and D F Cunningham-Reid both perished and were buried with full military honours in the local churchyard. The Germans dropped a letter into the British lines describing the courageous crew's fate, and burial

On a cold day near the end of 1915, some high-ranking brass visited FFA 62 and Kampfeinsatz Kommando Douai. They are, from left to right, Lt n von Seckendorf (adjutant), FFA 62 commander Hptm Kastner, Oswald Boelcke, Gen Arnim von Holstein, Max Immelmann, Lt n Albert Österreicher and Lt n d R Ernst Hess. In the background is a Fokker E IV – most likely Boelcke's machine, with its broad white fuselage band



landing at Vitry – with both of us at his heels.’

2Lt A L Russell, flying *sans* observer, landed safely with his bomb still aboard. Boelcke must have been tempted to claim this victory as his and thus pull ahead of Immelmann, but he generously allowed full credit to go to Ernst Hess as his first confirmed claim.

The Wiesbaden native Hess – who would turn 23 only three days later – had flown with *FFA* 9 until he managed to obtain a posting to the already-famous *FFA* 62 and joined the fighter *Kommando*, which now included Boelcke, Immelmann and Albert Österreicher.

Hess had been flying Fokker E I 32/15 for his first victory, and had fired over 100 rounds. He would go on to great success as an Albatros pilot in *Jagdstaffeln* 28 and 19, gaining 16 more victories before his death on 23 December 1917.

On 12 January Immelmann and Boelcke maintained their ‘tie’ when both achieved their eighth victories – a monumental score for the day. Major von der Lieth-Thomsen happened to be visiting the area, and he came along and offered his congratulations to both pilots. But, as Boelcke wrote;

‘The greatest surprise came in the evening. We were just sitting down to dinner when I was called to the telephone. There, the adjutant of the *Chef* announced himself and congratulated me on receiving the *Pour le Mérite*. I thought he was having a joke with me, but he informed me that the Order had been bestowed on Immelmann and myself by a telegram from His Majesty. Great were my surprise and joy. Then I went into the dining room, but said nothing and just sent Hauptmann Kastner to the telephone. He came back and made a public announcement about our decorations – at first everyone was astonished, and then there was great rejoicing.’

The *Orden Pour le Mérite*, nicknamed ‘the Blue Max’, was the Kingdom of Prussia’s highest award for bravery, and Boelcke and Immelmann were the first airmen to receive it. In the following days the two heroes were feted by royalty and top brass, and showered with congratulations from all quarters.

Coming as it did after eight victories, the award of the *Pour le Mérite* to Boelcke and Immelmann set a precedent. Before 1916 was over, ten more fighter pilots would also be awarded the order, with eight victories becoming the standard approval of the award (with the possible exception of Buddecke in the Dardanelles). The desire for such high honours and fame burned in the hearts of many Eindecker pilots, and drove them on to great feats – and, inevitably, often to their death.

German Fokker pilots were beginning to encounter larger groups of British aircraft which seemed to have been ‘well practised against



KEK Douai members enjoy some lunch in January 1916. They are, from left to right, Ernst Hess, Albert Österreicher in flying kit, Boelcke and Immelmann. After earning his first victory on 5 January, Hess looked forward to more success, but was transferred to Fokkerstaffel ‘C’ in the 3. Armee sector in the Champagne and found little action there. However, he would rejoin Boelcke in Fokkerstaffel Sivry in July, and would eventually achieve 17 victories

attacks by Fokkers', in the words of one FFA 32 pilot. This was largely the result of a famous RFC HQ order issued on 14 January 1916;

'Until the Royal Flying Corps is in possession of a machine as good or better as the Fokker it seems a change in the tactics employed becomes necessary. It is hoped very shortly to obtain a machine which will be able to successfully engage the Fokkers at present in use by the Germans. In the meantime, it must be laid down as a hard and fast rule that a machine proceeding on reconnaissance must be escorted by at least three other fighting machines. These machines must fly in close formation, and a reconnaissance should not be continued if any of the machines become detached.'

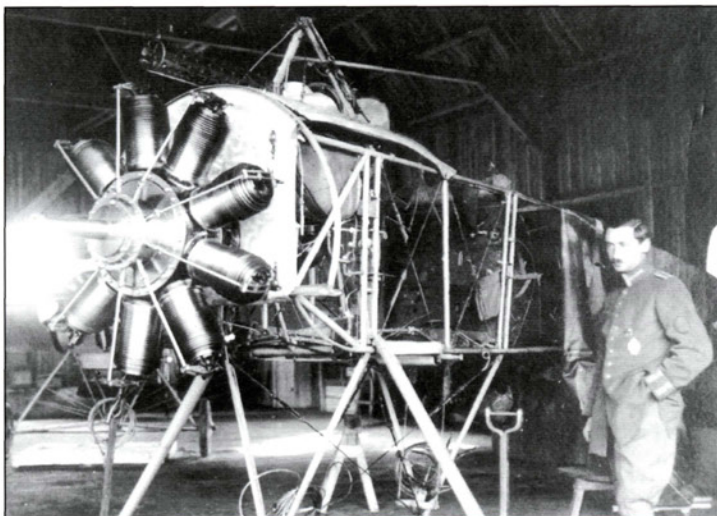
'From recent experience it seems that the Germans are now employing their aeroplanes in groups of three or four, and these numbers are frequently encountered by our aeroplanes. Flying in close formation must be practised by all pilots.'

Thus one lasting effect of the 'Fokker Scourge' was the introduction of formation flying.

Another aspiring fighter pilot who began to make a name for himself during this period of the 'Fokker Scourge' was Wilhelm Frankl. As the only Jewish airman to receive the 'Blue Max', Frankl's achievements would be suppressed by the Nazis in the 1930s, but this has been redressed in recent years.

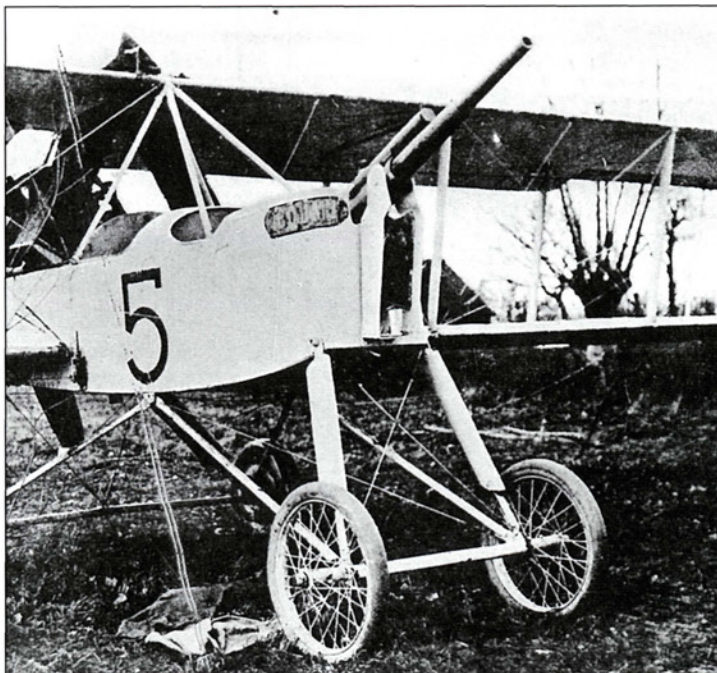
Born in Hamburg on 20 December 1893, Frankl had moved to Berlin with his family after living in Frankfurt-am-Main for a time. He gained his pilot's licence on 20 July 1913, having spent time at Melli Beese's flying school at Johannisthal. He served in FFA 40 during 1915, receiving both classes of the Iron Cross for his reconnaissance service.

On 10 May 1915, while still a vizefeldwebel, Frankl achieved his first victory in a two-seater by downing a French Voisin – the German crew were armed only with a five-shot carbine. Later, he volunteered to fly Eindeckers, and on 10 January 1916 he brought



Wilhelm Frankl is seen with the stripped fuselage of a Fokker E II or E III. Frankl had achieved his first victory as a two-seater pilot in FFA 40, then flew a Fokker monoplane to down his second opponent on 10 January 1916 . . .

. . . and this Voisin 4, armed with a 37 mm canon, was Frankl's victim on that date. Pilot Sgt Parent and observer Bonnier of the *Section d'Avions Canon du 36 Corps d'Armée* were both taken prisoner



Ltn d R Walter Höhndorf had been involved with the design and construction of aeroplanes before the war. A Voisin fell to his Fokker Eindecker on 17 January 1916 for his first accredited claim, followed by another on the same type on the 19th. Höhndorf's *Pour le Mérite* was awarded six months later



down a Voisin 4 that landed south of Woumen, near Dixmude. This was 'Voisin Canon' 991, armed with a 37 mm Hotchkiss gun. The crew of Sgt Parent and Fusilier Bonet were both captured, and their formidable-looking aircraft became the subject of many photographs, as well as an exhibition in Germany.

Only nine days after his second victory, Frankl gained his third on the 19th when he was credited with another Voisin. His fourth followed in rapid succession on 1 February (yet another Voisin over Chaulnes), but as with his third victory, no corresponding French losses can be found.

Frankl would eventually serve in the newly formed *Jasta 4* alongside Walter Höhndorf, another pre-war flier who gained fame as an Eindecker pilot.

Höhndorf was born in Prutzke on 10 November 1892. As a youth he displayed a keen interest in mechanical engineering, and travelled to Paris in 1913 and learned to fly Morane-Saulnier monoplanes at Villacoublay. After his return to Germany, he earned his pilot's certificate at Johannisthal in October 1913, flying an Etrich 'Taube'. He became a well-known aerial performer in his homeland, famous for his aerobatics. Höhndorf also helped to design and construct aircraft with the Union Flugzeugwerke in Teltow, near Berlin.

After the start of hostilities, he flew reconnaissance machines with *FFA 12* and 67, but his frontline service was periodically interrupted by trips back to Germany for test-flying duties. He was commissioned as a lieutenant der reserve on 15 March 1915, and was apparently flying his Eindecker with *FFA 12* on 17 January 1916 when he succeeded in forcing down a Voisin in Alsace Lorraine. The machine was captured, along with its crew of Cpl Follot and MdL Hennequet. Höhndorf followed this up with another Voisin victory just two days later.

As stated, Frankl and Höhndorf would later fly in *Jasta 4* with another early heavyweight, Rudolf Berthold. In January 1916, Berthold was still flying in the 2. *Armee* with the fighter detachment of *FFA 23*, based at Château Vaux, which by now had a complement of five aeroplanes.

On 11 January the unit was designated *Eindecker Kommando Vaux* (also known as *KEK Vaux*) and would be commanded by Oblt Berthold, operating directly under the orders of 2. *Armee* HQ. On 2 February 1916, the unit was credited with a brace of Voisins downed – one to Ernst von Althaus for his third and another to Berthold for his initial confirmed claim. The two Voisins were recorded as falling in the area of Chaulnes, southwest of Péronne, but only Voisin 3 1321 from *Escadrille VB 108* was lost. The pilot, Cpl Jacquin was taken PoW but the gunner Soldat Segaud was killed by Berthold's fire.

Some sources have suggested that the date of von Althaus' victory was incorrectly recorded, and was actually a Voisin or Nieuport downed on 3 February. At any rate, the fiercely determined Rudolf Berthold finally had his first victory of an eventual 44.

He had been born on 24 March 1891 at Ditterswind, near Bamberg, the son of a Franconian forester. A career soldier, he had been commissioned in the *Infanterie-Regt Nr 20 'Graf Tauentzien'* at Wittenberg. He first served as an observer in *FFA 23*, earning



The resolute commander of *KEK* Vaux was Oblt Rudolf Berthold, seen here second from left, with his groundcrew and his Fokker E III 411/15. Berthold would become the tenth Eindecker ace to receive the *Pour le Mérite*, and of those ten, only Berthold and von Althaus would survive the war. The seemingly indestructible Berthold accumulated 44 victories, and numerous wounds, before he was forcibly retired from the command of JG II in August 1918

Voisin 3 V1321 from *Escadrille* VB108 was Berthold's first victory on 2 February 1916. The pilot, Cpl Jacquin, managed to land the machine, but his gunner, Soldat Segaud, was killed

distinction for his reports made during the Marne battle. After pilot training, he returned to his *Abteilung* and began flying the big AEG G II with its three machine guns. As noted earlier, his costly experiences with the AEG soured him on the *Kampfflugzeug* approach and he soon began flying Fokker E-types.

Berthold scored a second time on 5 February in an action typifying the increasingly sophisticated tactics of aerial interception then being developed.

The appearance of enemy aircraft over the front was usually first noted by the forward flak formations, and information about the hostile machines' height, direction and number was now passed on to the *Armee Ober Kommando* (Army HQ). From there the information was passed directly on to the fighter units based at the *AOK* aerodrome.

On 5 February a flight of four BE 2cs from No 13 Sqn were on a reconnaissance mission which flew directly over the Bertincourt aerodrome of *FFA* 32 (Gustav Leffers' unit) at around 1000 hrs. The three fighters of *FFA* 32 scrambled to intercept them but were too late because of tardy warning. However, the information did reach Château Vaux, further south, in a timely manner due to the *AOK* warning system and Berthold quickly went aloft and gained sufficient height. He attacked BE 2c 4091 of 2Lts L J Pearson and E H Alexander, which was flying as escort for the others. Berthold's accurate bursts shot both of the aircraft's Lewis guns right off their mountings, as well as blowing two cylinders off the engine. Alexander



was wounded and Pearson landed the stricken two-seater between Gréville and Irles, where both RFC airmen were taken into captivity.

Also on the 2. *Armee* front, the fighter complement of *FFA* 32 (known as *KEK* Bertincourt) had been increased to four machines by 7 February. These were Fokker E IIIs 84/15 (Gustav Leffers) and 400/15 (Lt Burkhard Lehmann), Pfalz E I 220/15 (Lt Oskar Rouselle) and a new twin-gun Fokker E IV 440/15 (Lt Franz Diemer). The CO of *FFA* 32, Hptm Eberhard Bohnstedt, apparently decreed that the recently arrived Diemers would keep his E IV while the unit's 'star', Leffers, had to soldier on with his old 84/15.

Nonetheless, Leffers would score a third time in his weary 84/15 on 20 February when he attacked one BE 2c out of a group of four No 13 Sqn machines headed in the direction of Bapaume-Cambrai. Although he was under heavy defensive fire from the RFC aircraft, Leffers singled out the rear machine;

'I fired a fatal shot at the pilot of the aeroplane I had attacked, whereupon it went down in a steep glide and plunged the last 500 metres. I followed the aeroplane down to just above the ground to prevent the enemy crew from restarting the engine. The remaining aircraft of the squadron flew for the front as soon as they saw the crippled aeroplane crash.'

Once again, the unlucky crew of 2Lt F Garlick and Capt W Knox did not survive the encounter with Leffers.

VERDUN

One day after Leffers' third victory, on 21 February 1916, the protracted bloodbath known simply as the Battle of Verdun began. The massive German offensive was undertaken by the 5. *Armee*, under the command of Crown Prince Wilhelm, in an attempt to 'bleed the French white'. The ghastly attrition to follow would, in fact, nearly be the death of *both* armies, and run its course well into August, costing the lives of some 377,000 Frenchmen and 337,000 Germans.

For this operation Major von der Lieth-Thomsen had amassed an overwhelming aerial force. The *Stabsoffizier der Flieger der 5. Armee*, or *Stofl* 5 (Officer in charge of aviation for the 5th Army) was Hauptmann Wilhelm Haehnelt, who had some 168 aircraft at his disposal. Of these, the single-seat fighters were grouped into *KEK* formations. To the left of the Meuse River were *KEK* Avillers (or *KEK* 'Ost') and *KEK* Jametz, flying for *Maasgruppe Ost*. On the right, another *Kommando* was based at Cunel. Additional support for the right flank came from 3. *Armee* fighters at Vouziers.

Initially, these fighters were intended for use in patrol flights to provide a gigantic *Sperre*, or blockade, for the Verdun offensive.

On 11 March 1916 Boelcke established a fighter *Kommando* at Sivry, only 11 kilometres behind the frontline at Verdun. He is pictured with his Fokker E IV and faithful groundcrew. On the front of the cowling, between the two central cooling holes, a small aluminium 'OB' plaque was affixed. It reportedly stood for Oberursel, but conveniently could also have stood for Oswald Boelcke!





While Boelcke was flying in the thick of the Verdun offensive, Immelmann was busy as well. On 2 March he forced Morane BB 5137 of No 3 Sqn to land near Somain for his ninth victory. The observer, 2Lt H F Birdwood, was killed in the air, while the pilot, 2Lt C W Palmer, was wounded in the foot, although he still managed to put the machine down intact. German doctors amputated Palmer's foot, but he died of blood poisoning on 29 March (T Phillips)

Oblt Hans Berr of KEK Avillers was flying on the Verdun front when he was credited with a Nieuport downed on 8 March. After scoring ten victories he would die on 6 April 1917 as commander of Jasta 5, when his Albatros D III collided with another flown by Vfw Paul Hoppe of the same Staffel (HAC/UTD)



However, there were never enough single-seaters to be effective, and the bulk of the 'blockade' patrols would be flown by two-seaters of the tactical formations known as the *Kagohl* (*Kampfgeschwader der Obersten Heeresleitung*, or Battle Squadron of the Army High Command). In spite of this, French aircraft still managed to penetrate the 'blockade' system, and it was then up to the Fokkers to intercept them. The mistaken application of Fokker Eindeckers

in fruitless *Sperreflüge* wore out their delicate rotary engines and proved a waste of precious flying time.

Boelcke had been transferred to the *Kommando* based at Jametz, but was forced to sit out the first days of the offensive in the hospital due to 'some stupid intestinal trouble'. He soon recovered and returned to Jametz, which he complained was too far from the front. He obtained permission from Haehnelt to use the forward airfield near Sivry – north of Verdun, and only 11 km behind the lines – for a small detachment of two (later three) Fokkers.

Arriving at Sivry on 11 March, Boelcke then devised a groundbreaking system whereby a forward observation post was connected to his aerodrome via telephone, and it could inform him when the arrival of French aircraft was imminent. In this way he conserved both his energy and his aircraft. Boelcke's Sivry *Kommando* provided the model for other fighter units to come, and as always he was in the forefront of the development of new tactics. General von Hoepfner, the later *Kogenluft* (commanding general of the German Army Air Service) wrote;

'We owe it to Boelcke's ability and his sense of duty that the enemy's numerical superiority did not become a crushing burden upon us.'

A few days before Boelcke arrived at Sivry, a pilot in another one of Hptm Haehnelt's *Kommandos* drew his first blood in the Verdun operation. Oblt Hans Berr, a member of KEK Avillers, claimed

his initial victory over what was described as a Nieuport on 8 March.

Berr, a Braunschweiger, was born on 20 May 1890 and had entered the war with Naumberg's *Jägerregiment Nr 4*. After being severely wounded on 26 September 1914, he was eventually transferred to the air service, returning to the front as an observer in May of 1915. This hardly appeased his desire for action, and after pilot training Berr was posted to the

Four victories were credited to Eindecker pilots on 13 March 1916, one of them being BE 2c 4197. Max Immelmann fired some 300 rounds at the No 8 Sqn aircraft, which crashed near Pelves, east of Arras. This was the second of two machines that fell to Immelmann's fire that day for his first 'double' (T Phillips)

KEK at Avillers. Now that he had added his name to the list of successful Fokker pilots, Berr wasted little time and scored his second victory only six days later – a Caudron northwest of Verdun.

Berr's first victim of 8 March may have been a Nieuport 10 two-seater of *Escadrille* N 3, which had an observer wounded that day. German airmen were now also encountering more and more of the nimble Nieuport 11 single-seat fighters, armed with a single Lewis gun mounted on the top wing. The arrival of these agile little sesquiplanes, flown by such determined and aggressive pilots as Jean Navarre and Georges Guynemer, ushered in hard times for the Eindecker pilots. The Nieuports were clearly superior to the Fokkers in manoeuvrability, climb and speed. By the beginning of February 1916, the *Aviation Militaire* had a total of 210 Nieuports in service on the Western Front, of which around 90 were Nieuports 11s.

Nonetheless, the Fokker pilots persisted, and men of the tactical acuity and skill of Boelcke could still achieve impressive results in the hotly contested sky over Verdun. On 12 March Boelcke flew his Fokker E IV against a pair of Farmans he found over *Mort Homme* ('Dead Man's Hill'). He chased one down to 500 metres and was about to deliver the *coup de grâce* when both his guns jammed – the French aircraft just managed to glide across the Meuse and land east of Marre. Ground observers reported that a wounded man was carried from the aircraft, which was soon destroyed by German shellfire, and Boelcke had his tenth victory.

On the same day Otto Parschau, flying with *Kagohl* 1, was apparently credited with his third opponent, also on the Verdun front. This was most likely a Nieuport 11 from N49.

13 March was an extremely busy day for Eindecker exponents, and an unlucky one for Allied airmen. Once again the indomitable Boelcke



was successful, picking out a Voisin from a large formation at about 1300 hrs;

‘As I was high above him, I came down quickly and shot him up well before he grasped the situation. He turned tail at once and bolted for his lines. I attacked him vigorously again, then he heeled over by the right and disappeared under my wing. I thought he had gone down, but went into a turn so as to keep sight of him, and then I saw to my astonishment that the machine was flying level once more. Then I saw a most amazing sight.

‘The observer had climbed out of the machine and was sitting on the left wing, holding onto a strut. He stared up at me in terror and waved his hand. It was such a pitiful spectacle, that for a moment I hesitated to fire at him because he was completely defenceless. I must have shot away the controls and caused the machine to heel over, then the observer climbed out and sat on the wing to restore the balance. I sent just a few shots at the pilot so as to force him right down, then my attention was diverted by another Frenchman coming to his comrade’s aid. The other machine then went down for a short stretch in a glide, but finally crashed from a low height to the east of Malancourt village.’

On the same day up on the British front, two veteran Eindecker exponents scored, and a pair of unfortunate BE 2c crews from No 8 Sqn were lost. One went down to Rudolf Berthold of *KEK* Vaux, who was flying with two other Fokkers from his unit – indicative of an increasing trend toward formation attacks. The BE 2c was forced down near Bournonville and both occupants made PoWs. The other BE 2c was claimed by Max Immelman. Earlier in the day, flying with newcomer Max Mulzer, Immelman had dispatched a Bristol C Scout biplane, flown by No 4 Sqn’s commander Major V A Barrington-Kennett. The RFC pilot was killed. Immelman thus drew even with Boelcke yet again with his 11th score.

Gustav Leffers, the crack pilot of *KEK* Bertincourt, was also in action on the 13th in his timeworn E III 84/15. His attention was drawn to Bapaume by bursting flak shells which were bracketing two BE 2c biplanes. Leffers closed to within 100 metres of one before opening fire. This time he had found skilful opponents (2Lt J C Cunningham and 1AM J W Newton of No 15 Sqn) who knew how to fly defensively. Leffers wrote;

‘Several times, our two machines were so close to each other in the steep turn that I clearly saw the pilot extending his clenched fist at me. Shortly thereafter, there came an unpleasant moment for both machines. At a distance of about 30 metres, both machines suddenly turned and flew towards one another at exactly the same altitude. In doing so, I got my opponent right in my sights, and I didn’t want to



Another victor on 13 March was Boelcke, who flew his Fokker E IV from Sivry to claim a Voisin. A mechanic prepares to swing the propeller of Boelcke’s E IV, which displays a spinner that is not always seen in photographs of this machine. The broad white fuselage band, which was Boelcke’s personal emblem, appears stained and worn. The wheel cover may have been painted in equal segments of red, black and white

turn aside. At the last moment, I attempted to get past and underneath the enemy machine by diving but, at the same instant, my opponent tried the same thing. Now a collision was inevitable, but I let go of the controls, my crate shot up – a brief jolt went through the machine. I had grazed my opponent's top wing with my wheels. Unnerved by this, my opponent suddenly went into a dive to increase the distance between us, and to escape to the front.'

Leffers, nerves intact, pulled in behind the fleeing BE 2c and sent it down burning from 500 metres – both unfortunate crewmen were 'completely incinerated'. Leffers now had his significant fourth victory, and his name would soon be appearing in official communiqués.

ERNST UDET

By this time German fighter formations were being developed along the entire Western Front. At the far southeastern end of the trench lines, in the region of the Vosges Mountains near the Swiss border, *Kampfeinsatz Kommando Habsheim* was formed. This unit was located near Mülhausen to counter bombing attacks on nearby industry. Compared to Flanders and Verdun, the Vosges front was relatively quiet, but it would still provide the first fighter experiences of a young pilot destined to take his name to lofty heights in German aviation – Vfw Ernst Udet.

Born in Frankfurt-am-Main on 26 April 1896, Udet soon moved to Munich with his family. Always fascinated by engines and aeronautics, Udet managed to join a Württemberg Reserve Division at the war's outbreak as an 18-year-old motorcyclist messenger. Having learned to fly through private lessons, he joined FFA 68 in November 1915 and soon found himself in the unit's fighter *Kommando*.

On 12 March 1916, Udet took off in his Eindecker in search of a Caudron that had been reported by the forward observers. He climbed through a grey haze and sighted the G 4 above the cloud layer. He was startled to see the Caudron heading brazenly straight toward him. His first victory would seem to have been at hand, but the youngster's nerves – or his innate humanity – got in the way. Udet wrote;

'He is now so close, I can make out the head of the observer. The moment has come when I must fire. But I can't. It is as though horror has frozen the blood in my veins, paralysed my arms and torn all thought from my brain with the swipe of a paw. I sit there, flying on, and continue to stare, as though mesmerised, at the Caudron now to my left. Then the machine gun barks across to me. The impacts on my Fokker sound like metallic clicks.'

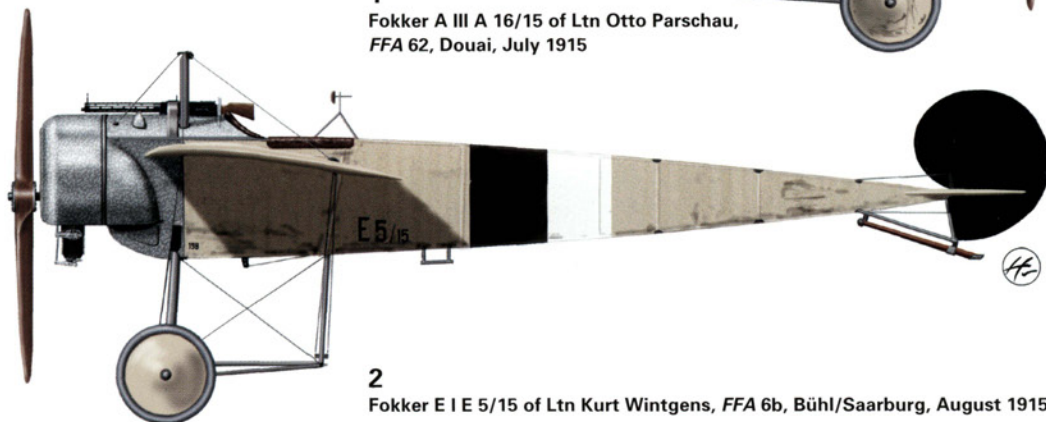
Udet's Eindecker shuddered under the impact of the Caudron's bursts, and suddenly a grazing shot ripped off his goggles. The German dived into the clouds and reached up to feel the blood on his face, caused by splinters from his shattered goggles. Udet flew back to his base, benumbed and sickened by what he felt was his cowardice.

Only six days later, the French sent a gigantic bombing raid against Mülhausen composed of 17 Farmans, three Caudron G 4s and three Breguet-Michelins. This armada took off from Belfort at 1500 hrs French time. At Habsheim, Udet was the only pilot on duty on what seemed a lazy Sunday afternoon. Suddenly (*text continues on page 49*)

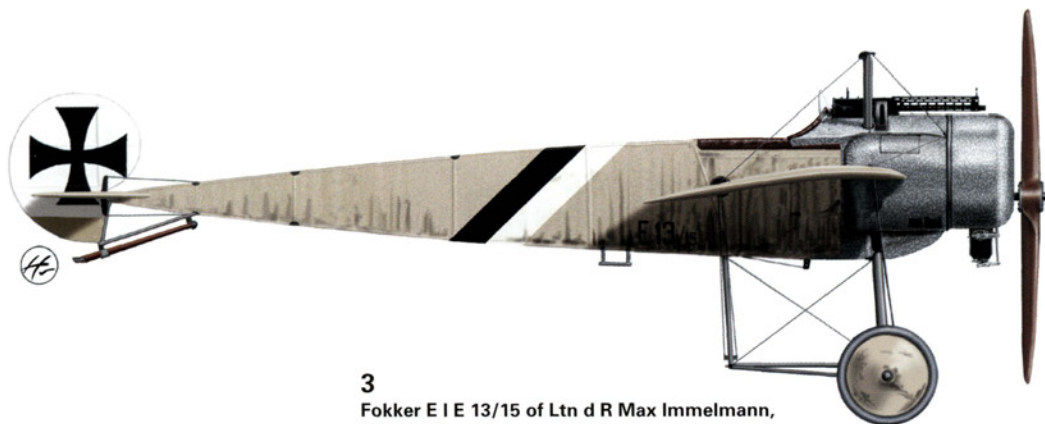
COLOUR PLATES



1
Fokker A III A 16/15 of Ltn Otto Parschau,
FFA 62, Douai, July 1915



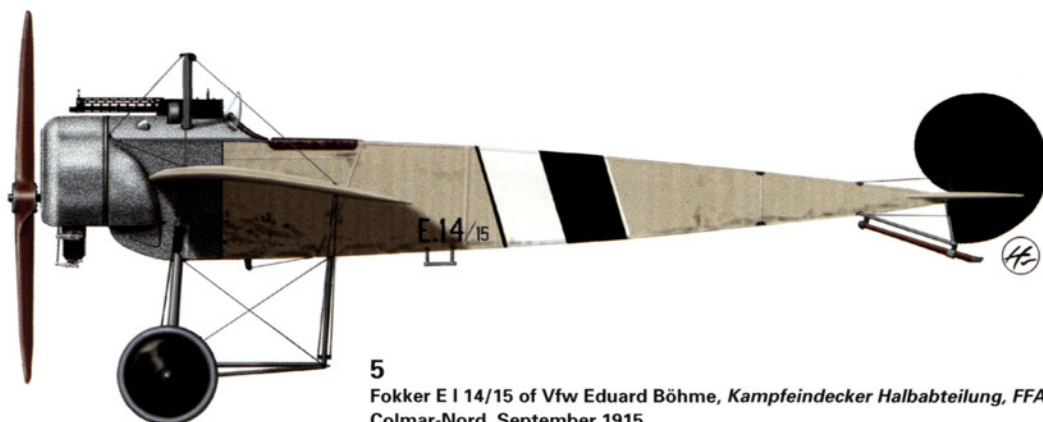
2
Fokker E I E 5/15 of Ltn Kurt Wintgens, FFA 6b, Bühl/Saarburg, August 1915



3
Fokker E I E 13/15 of Ltn d R Max Immelmann,
FFA 62, Douai, August 1915



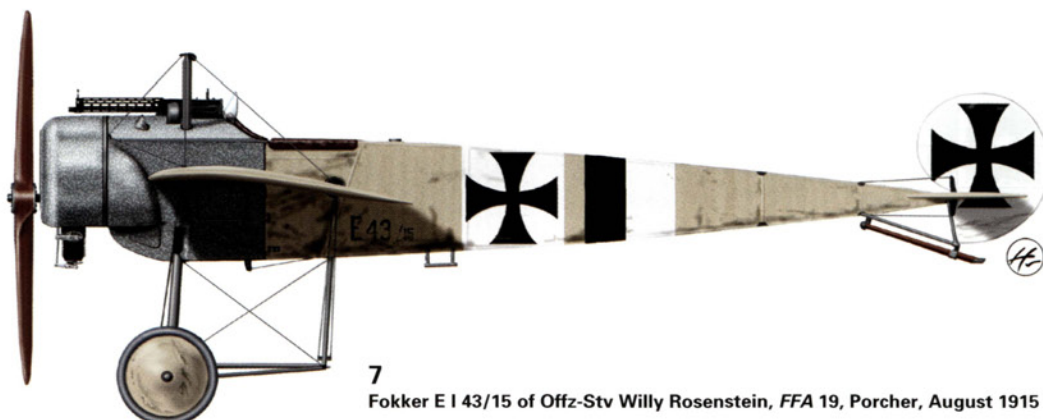
4
Fokker E II 37/15 of Ltn Oswald Boelcke/Ltn d R Max Immelmann, FFA 62,
Douai, October 1915



5
Fokker E I 14/15 of Vfw Eduard Böhme, *Kampfeindecker Halbbabteilung, FFA 9b*,
Colmar-Nord, September 1915



6
Fokker E II 33/15 of Vfw Eduard Böhme, *KEK Ensisheim, FFA 9b*, January 1916



7
Fokker E I 43/15 of Offz-Stv Willy Rosenstein, *FFA 19, Porcher*, August 1915

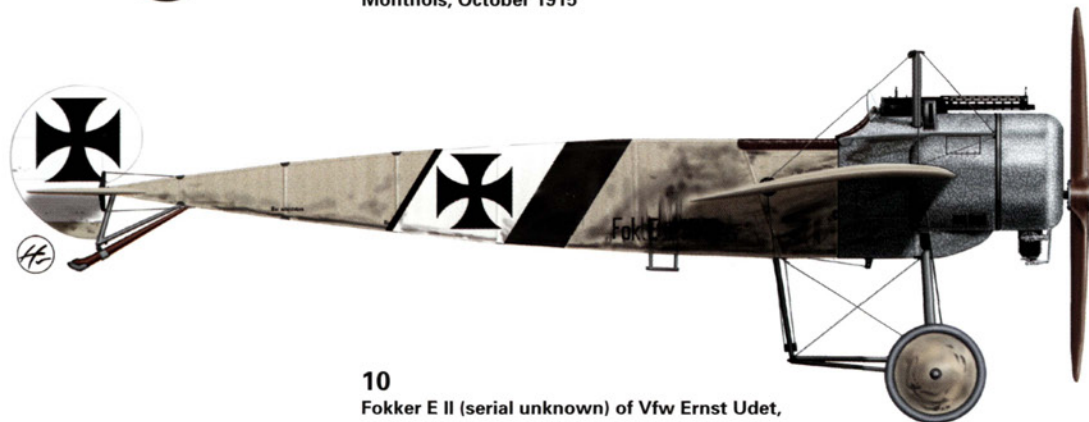


8
Fokker E II 69/15 of Ltn Kurt *Freiherr* von Crailsheim, *FFA 53, Monthois*,
September 1915



9

Fokker E II (serial unknown) of Ltn Kurt *Freiherr* von Crailsheim, FFA 53, Monthois, October 1915



10

Fokker E II (serial unknown) of Vfw Ernst Udet, KEK Habsheim, circa March 1916



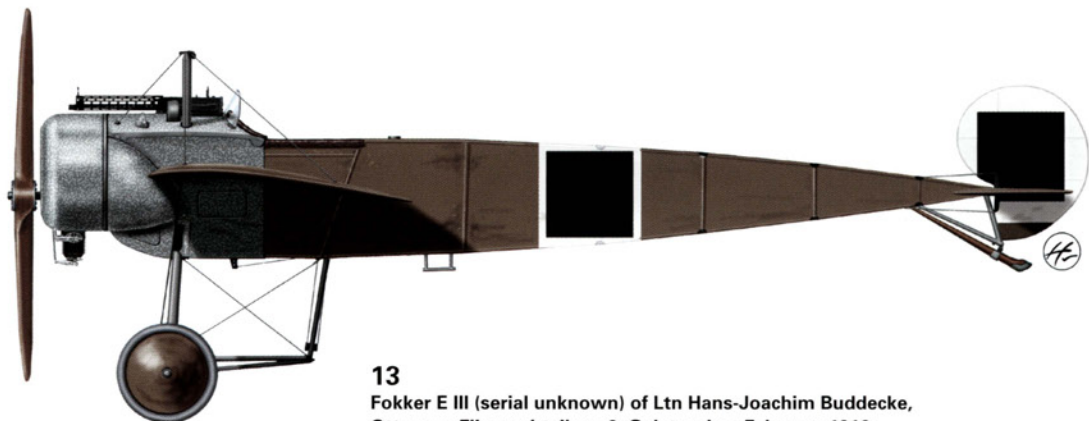
11

Fokker E III LF 196 of Ltn zur See Gotthard Sachsenberg, Nr 1 *Marine Feldflieger Abteilung*, Mariakerke, circa November 1915



12

Fokker E III 96/15 of Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke, *Fokkerstaffel*, Ottoman *Fliegerabteilung* 6, Galata, circa December 1915



13
Fokker E III (serial unknown) of Ltn Hans-Joachim Buddecke,
Ottoman *Fliegerabteilung 6*, Galata, circa February 1916



14
Fokker E IV 123/15(?) of Oblt Oswald Boelcke, *Kommando Sivry*, circa April 1916



15
Fokker E IV (serial unknown) of Oblt Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus,
KEK Vaux, circa April 1916



16
Fokker E IV 147/15 of Ltn d R Walter Höhdorf, *KEK Vaux*, Summer 1916



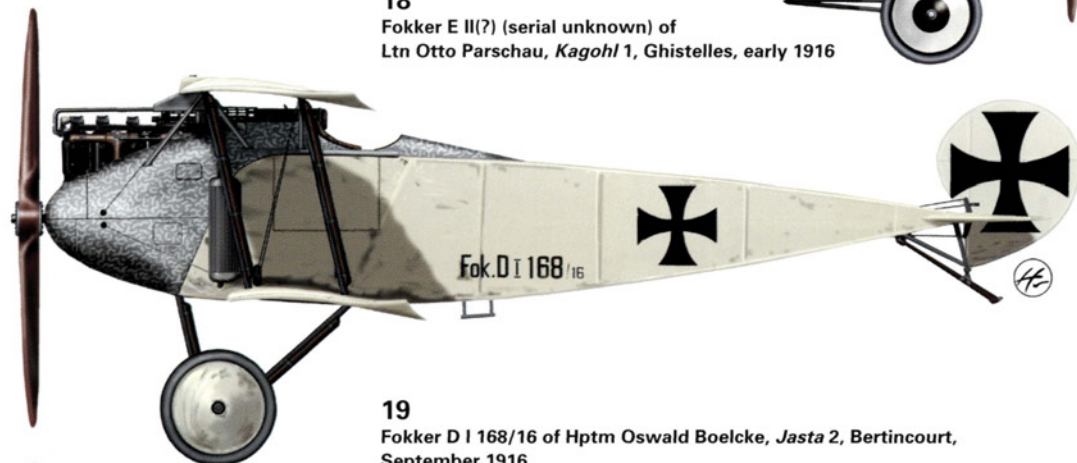
17

Fokker E IV (serial unknown) of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 Fokkerstaffel, Leffincourt, August 1916



18

Fokker E II(?) (serial unknown) of Ltn Otto Parschau, *Kagohl* 1, Ghistelles, early 1916



19

Fokker D I 168/16 of Hptm Oswald Boelcke, *Jasta* 2, Bertincourt, September 1916



20

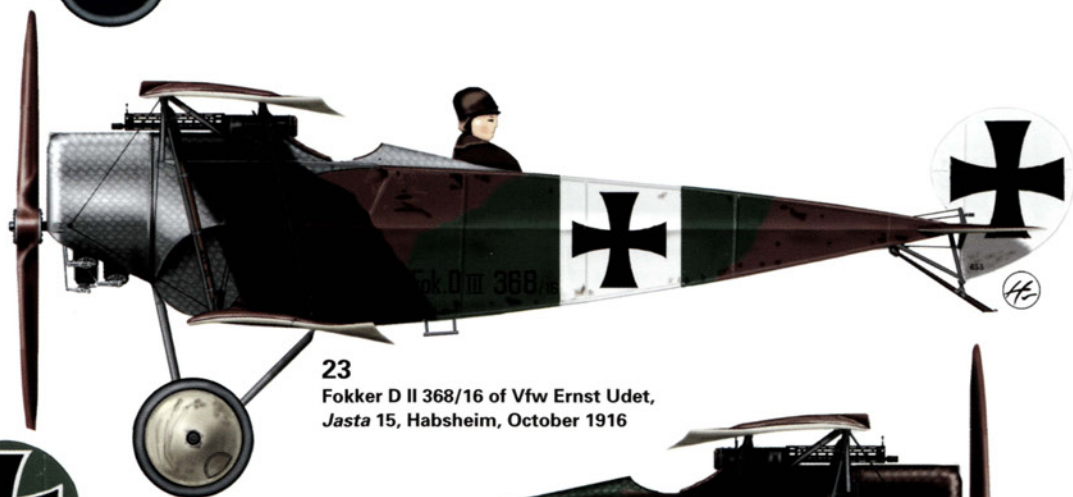
Fokker D III 352/16 of Hptm Oswald Boelcke, *Jasta* 2, Bertincourt, September 1916



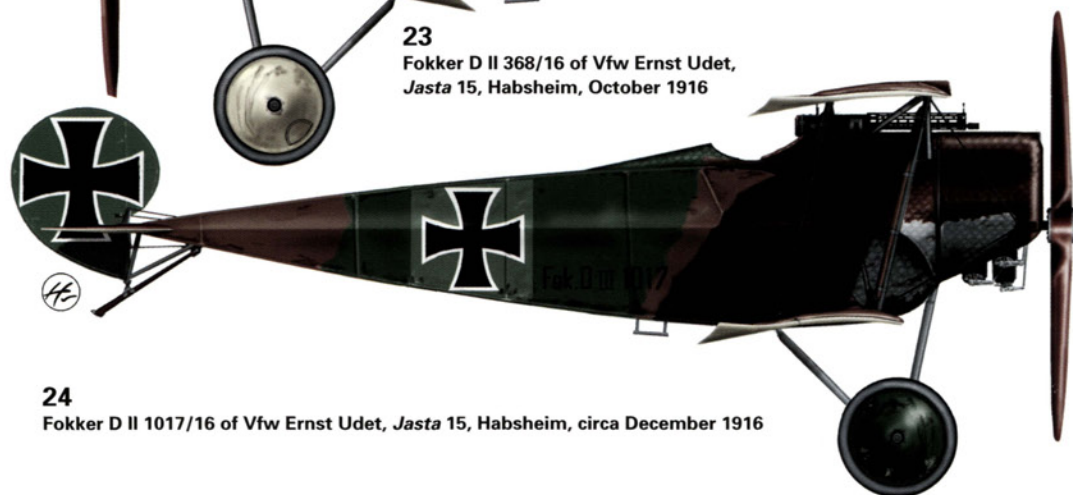
21
Fokker D II 540/16 of Ltn d R Otto Kissenberth, *KEK* Ensisheim, October 1916



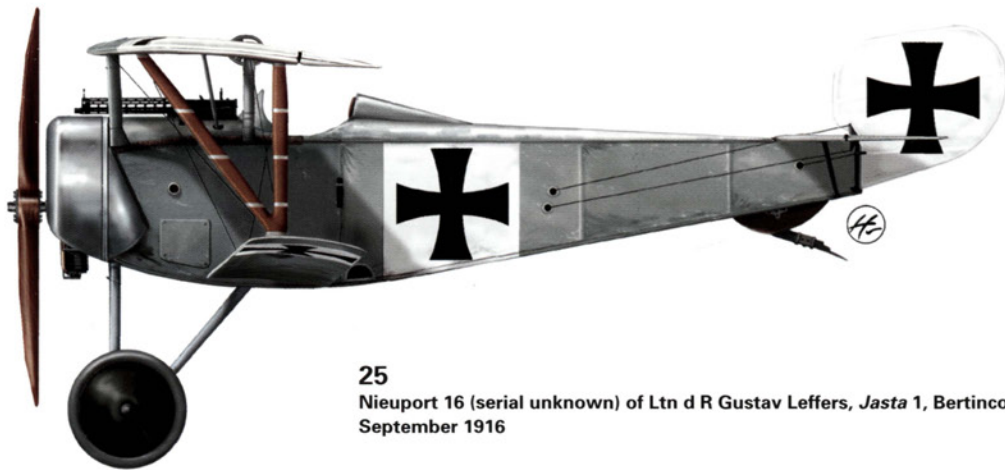
22
Fokker D II 541/16 of Ltn d R Josef Jacobs, *Fokkerstaffel West/Jasta 12*, Chauny, October 1916



23
Fokker D II 368/16 of Vfw Ernst Udet, *Jasta 15*, Habsheim, October 1916



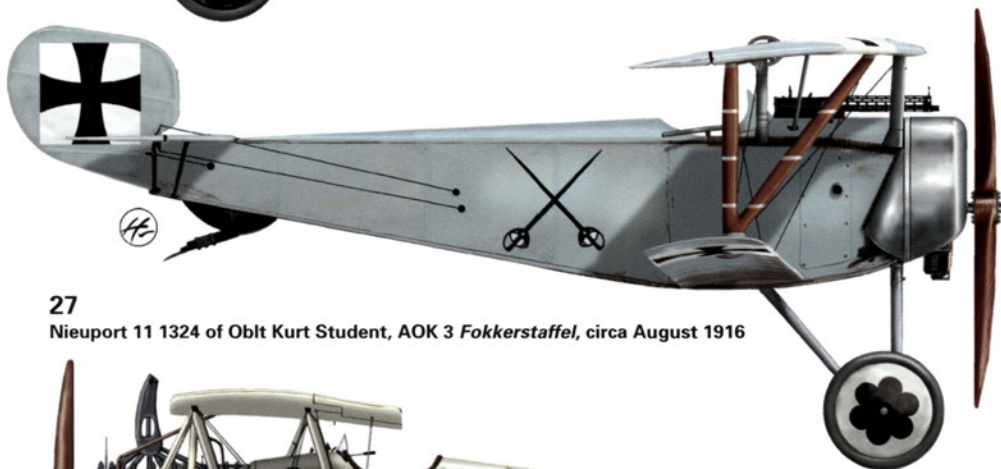
24
Fokker D II 1017/16 of Vfw Ernst Udet, *Jasta 15*, Habsheim, circa December 1916



25
Nieuport 16 (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Gustav Leffers, *Jasta 1*, Bertincourt, September 1916



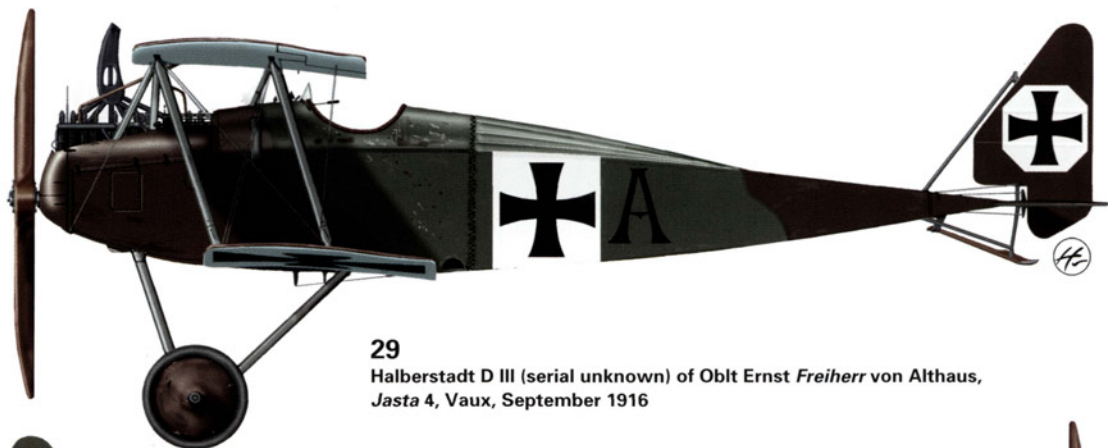
26
Nieuport 11 1324 of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 *Fokkerstaffel*, Leffincourt, July 1916



27
Nieuport 11 1324 of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 *Fokkerstaffel*, circa August 1916



28
Halberstadt D III (serial unknown) of Ltn Hans von Keudell, *Jasta 1*, Bertincourt, September 1916



29
Halberstadt D III (serial unknown) of Oblt Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus,
Jasta 4, Vaux, September 1916



30
Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Oblt Hans Berr, *Jasta 5*, Gonnellieu, early 1916

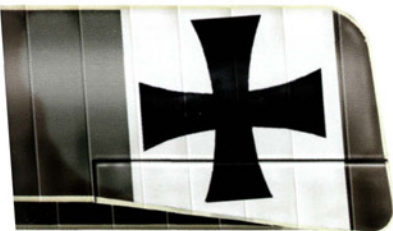


31
Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke,
Jasta 4, Vaux, circa October 1916

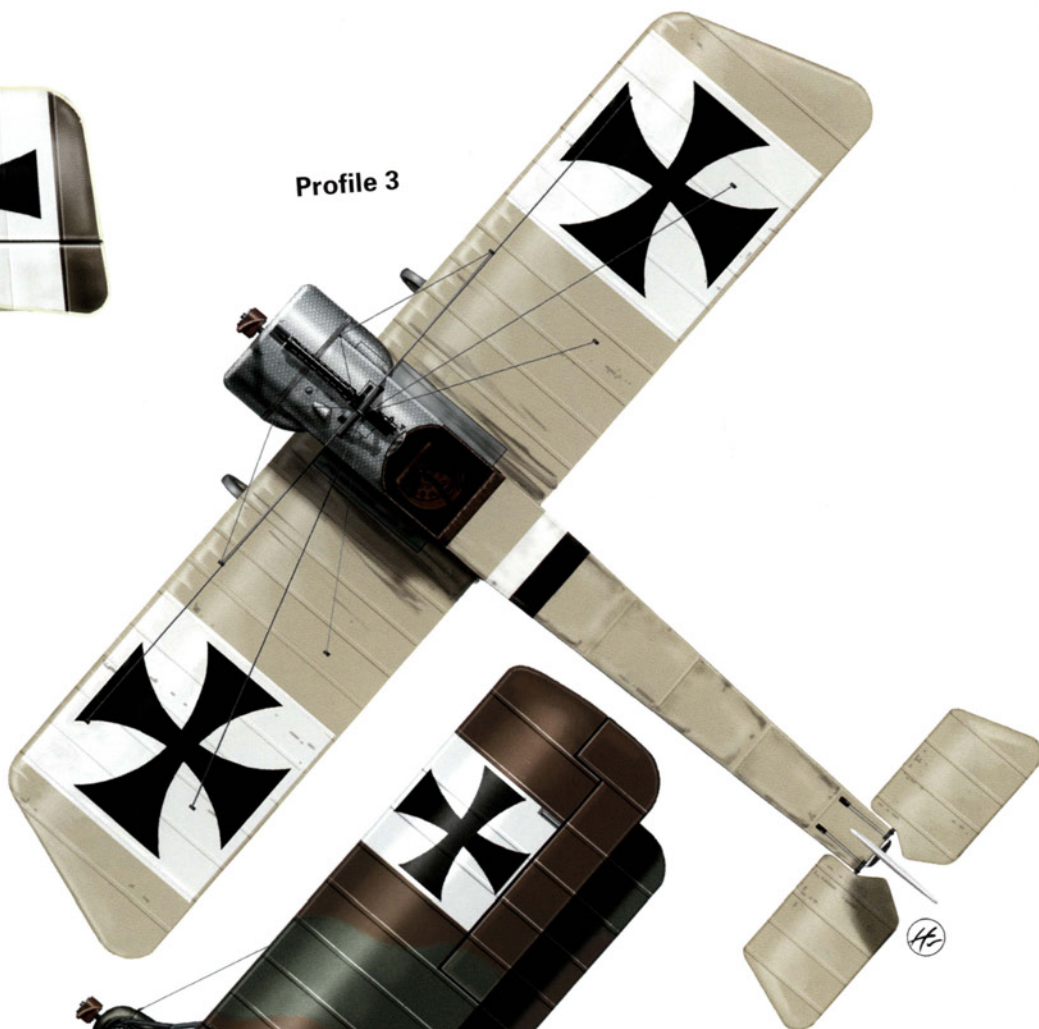


32
Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Josef Jacobs, *Jagdstaffelschule I*,
Valenciennes, December 1916

Profile 29



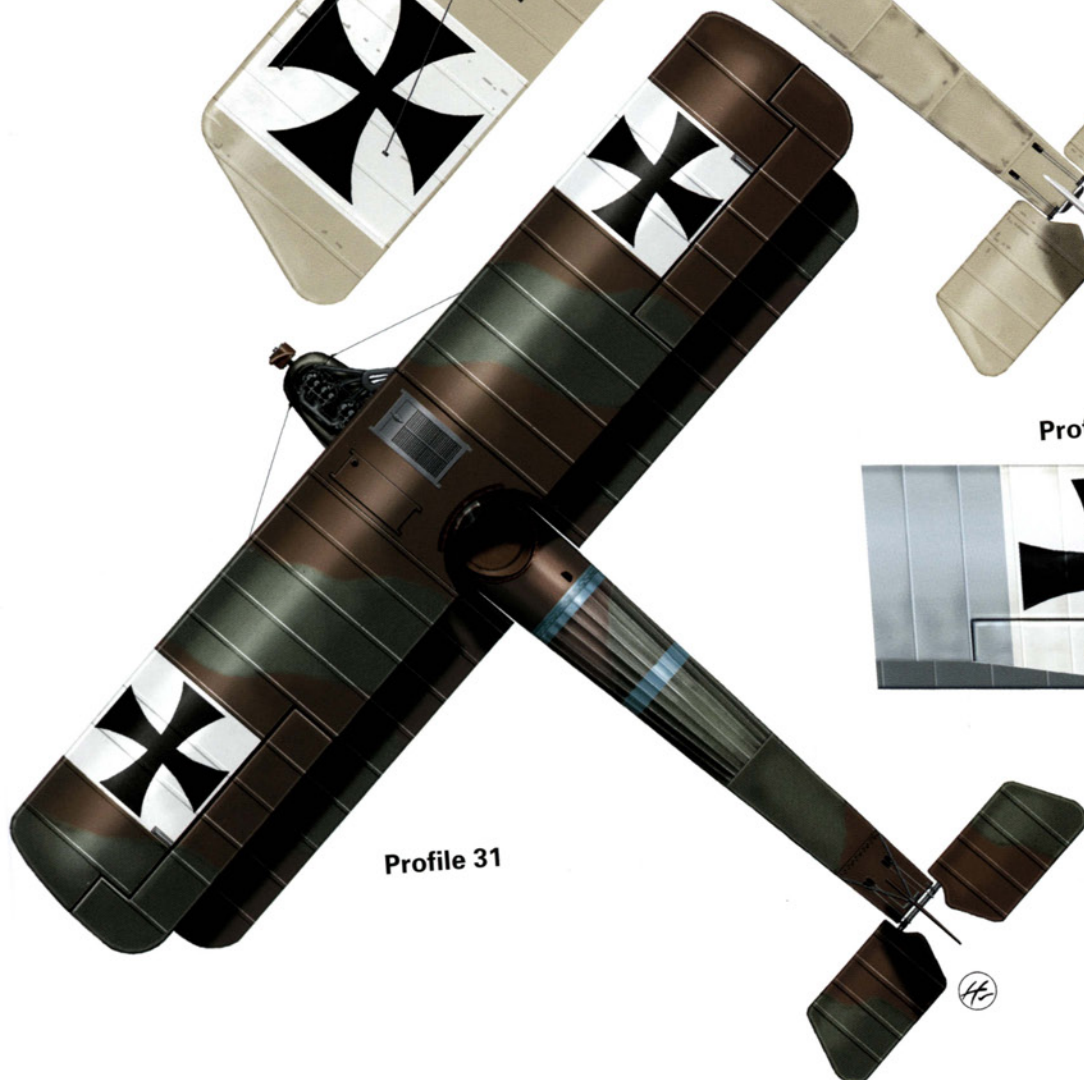
Profile 3

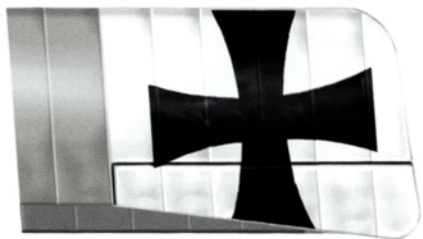


Profile 27



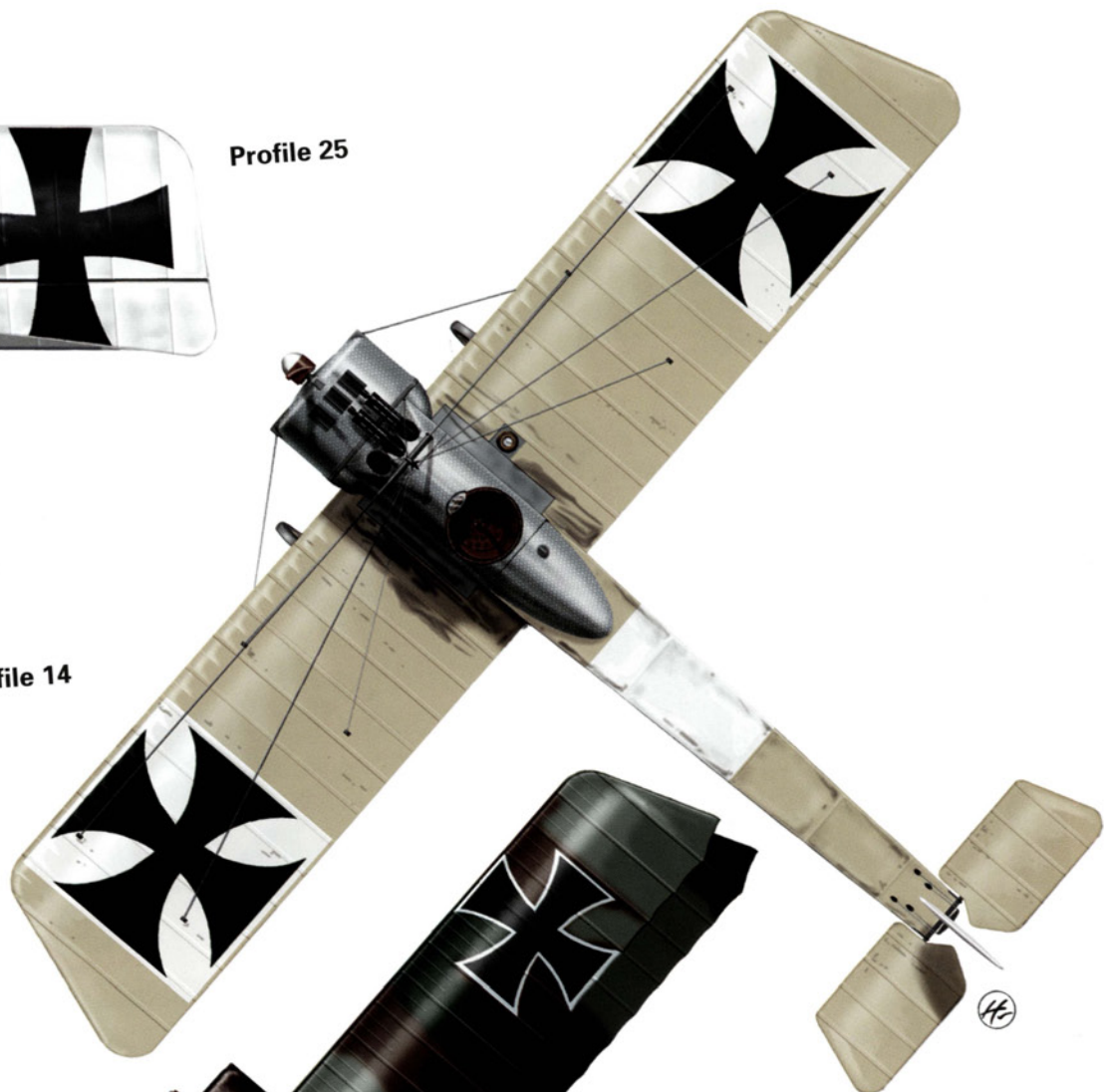
Profile 31



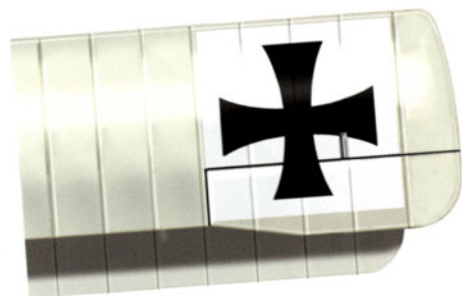


Profile 25

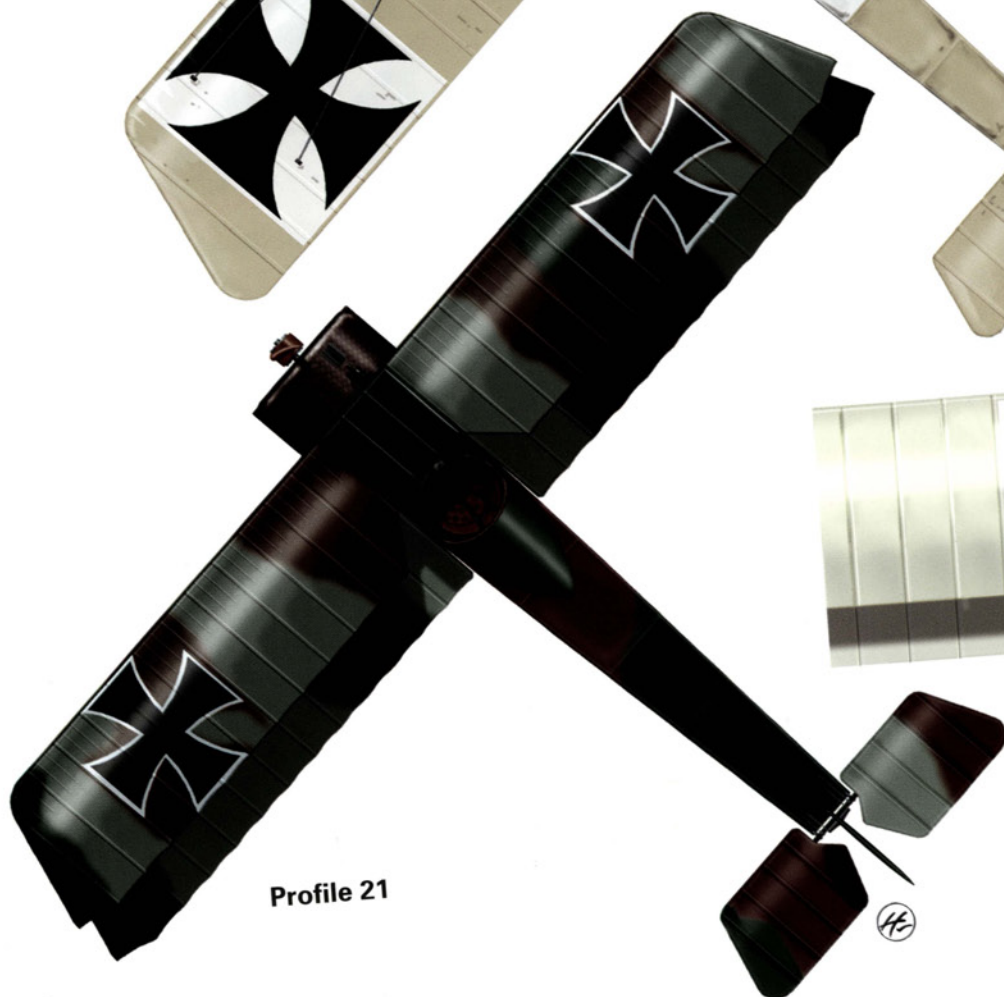
Profile 14



Profile 28



Profile 21





Ernst Udet of *KEK Habsheim* has drawn quite a crowd around his Eindecker. This photo reportedly was taken after his first victory on 18 March 1916, and Udet's confident stance seems to bear this out

This familiar photograph shows Udet's Fokker, which bears the markings of *Armee Abteilung Gaede*. This Eindecker has been previously identified as E III 105/15, but it seems more likely to have been an E II or even an E I. The striped insignia of units allocated to *Armee Abteilung Gaede* are always recorded specifically as black and white. The leading diagonal stripe here does not appear black, but the author believes this is due to the thinned application of paint, the effects of sunlight and the type of film in use. Atop the fuselage, the tonality of the leading stripe matches that of the black cross and trailing edge black stripe

two French aircraft were reported approaching Altkirch, and Udet scrambled in his Fokker, determined to redeem himself.

At 2800 metres over Altkirch, he spotted the French aircraft, and incredulously began to count them – not two machines, but 23! He was the lone German pilot aloft. He climbed to 300 metres above them, his heart beating in his throat, damp hands clutching the stick. His old hesitation nearly returned, and he knew that if he failed a second time, his career as a *Jagdflieger* was over. He steeled himself and dived on a big Farman in the centre of the formation;

'Closer, closer, 40 metres, 30, now! Whatever the barrel will spit out, "tack, tack, tack". There, he totters. A blue flame shoots forth from his exhaust, he lists and white smoke belches forth – hit, hit in the fuel tank!

"Clack, clack, clack" – with metallic sounds, bullets hit my machine just in front of the cockpit. I whip my head around and look to the rear. Two Caudrons covering me with machine gun bursts. I remain calm – stick forward, and I dive down. 300 metres below I pull out.

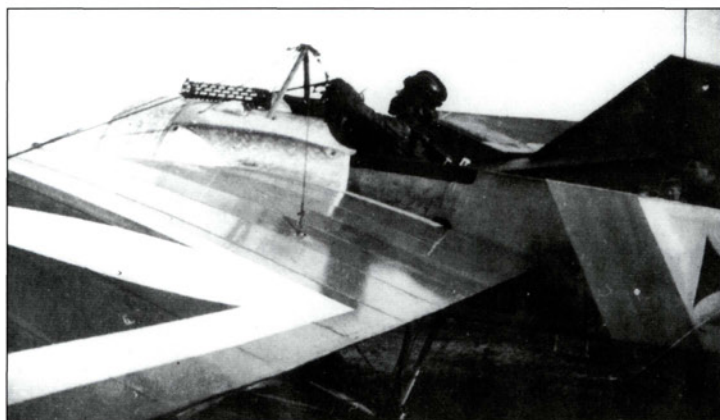
'The fuselage of the Farman dives down past me like a giant torch, trailing a black cloud from which bright flames spurt forth. A man, his arms and legs spread out like a frog's, falls past – the observer. At the moment I don't think of them as human beings. I feel only one thing

– victory, triumph, victory!'

Udet's Fokker was now joined by other fighters from Habsheim. He next attacked a Caudron and hit one engine, but then suffered a jammed gun and was forced to let his quarry go. His comrades Fw Weingärtner and Uffz Willy Glinkermann also destroyed a bomber each. Udet was on his way to 62 eventual victories.

Some 180 single-seat fighters were delivered to the front between June 1915 and April 1916.





The fuselage stencilling visible on the original print of this photograph identifies *this* aircraft as Fokker E III 105/15, which bears similar fuselage markings to Udet's machine seen on page 49. However, the positioning of the fuselage bands is quite different. The pilot may well be Udet at KEK Habsheim, but this is unconfirmed

Oswald Boelcke takes off in his Fokker E IV. He achieved his 12th victory in this type on 19 March, but was becoming disillusioned with the E IV. Three days earlier he had written 'I have had a lot of success with my 160 hp machine in the last few days, but a lot of trouble too. I got quite close to French machines behind our own lines on several occasions, but they escaped me because my engine was not in order'



However, the majority of victories scored were still being won by a relatively small number of aggressive and skilled pilots. Foremost among these was, of course, Boelcke, who destroyed a Farman from MF19 on 19 March for his 12th victory. Using his usual tactic of getting in to very close range before opening up, Boelcke killed the pilot in the air and shot one wing off the luckless pusher.

He soon had a telephone call from Immelmann, who congratulated him and then told Boelcke to wait before scoring again, so he could catch up! Boelcke good-naturedly replied he would wait one week, but the very next day he flamed a Farman for his 13th.

The rivalry between Boelcke and Immelmann had long been presumed to have been a friendly one, a view proffered in the propagandistic German histories of the 1930s. Recently uncovered private letters from Boelcke reveal, however, that their relationship was often a strained one, and that Boelcke held Immelmann in some contempt.

THE LESSONS OF VERDUN

The lessons learned from painful experience at Verdun were gradually being disseminated to other sectors of the front. These lessons included the knowledge that the use of single Eindeckers attached to *Feldflieger Abteilungen* rarely yielded the results which could be obtained when several fighters were grouped together in self-contained units. In the German 7. *Armee*, northeast of Verdun and opposite Soissons, an order issued on 21 March stated that;

'The use of Fokker *Kampfeindeckers* for barricade flights has not been approved because the engines are very delicate and suffer very much under the strong demands and must be repaired frequently. Consequently, the combat aircraft will be withdrawn to their actual purpose of attacking enemy aircraft when they come behind our lines. Accordingly, it will be arranged that as from 1 April 1916, the Fokker

aircraft will be assembled into two *Staffeln* (East and West).

'Airfield of the West-*Staffel* will be at Le Faux Ferme, northeast of Coucy. Airfield of the East-*Staffel* will be just west of St Erme. To *Fokker-Staffel-West* will go the aircraft of (*Feldflieger*) *Abteilung* 7, 11, and 39 – four aircraft. To *Fokker-Staffel-Ost* will go the aircraft of *Abteilung* 26 and 29 – five aeroplanes.

'The *Fokker Staffeln* will come under the direct orders of the *Stabsoffizier der Flieger* to whom they are allocated.'

Fokkerstaffel-West was placed under the command of Oblt Erich Hoenemanns, while *Fokkerstaffel-Ost* would be led by Ltn Eitel-Friedrich Rüdiger von Manteuffel.

Even as more and more Fokker fighters were being grouped into such units, it was becoming depressingly clear that the technical superiority they had once enjoyed was in decline. On 24 March Boelcke had written an extensive report to the *Feldflugchef*, detailing the faults of the twin-gun Fokker E IV and its 160 hp Oberursel U III. He wrote that;

'The machine loses much speed in climbing, so that several Nieuport biplanes escaped me in consequence. The climbing capacity falls off considerably at great heights (over 3000 metres). This defect could be avoided by bringing out a light biplane. The manoeuvring power of the 160 hp machine is considerably inferior to that of the 100 hp and 80 hp types because of the difficulty in countering the active force of the heavy engine'.

Partly in response to earlier calls from Boelcke and others (including Berthold) for a small single-seat biplane fighter, *Idflieg* placed its first order for 12 Halberstadt D I scouts on 8 March 1916. However, it would be a considerable time before these and other improved types would arrive, leaving the burden of fighter duties to fall on the monoplanes for some time to come.

On the British front, Immelman and other Fokker pilots were also encountering improved opposition. In February, the manoeuvrable de Havilland DH 2 pusher fighter arrived in France in force with No 24 Sqn (commanded by the redoubtable Capt Lanoe Hawker). Although the DH 2 had its share of teething troubles, it would prove a formidable foe.

Despite these problems, Immelman had managed to keep up his scoring competition with Boelcke, pulling ahead on 23 April (Easter Sunday) with his 14th victory.

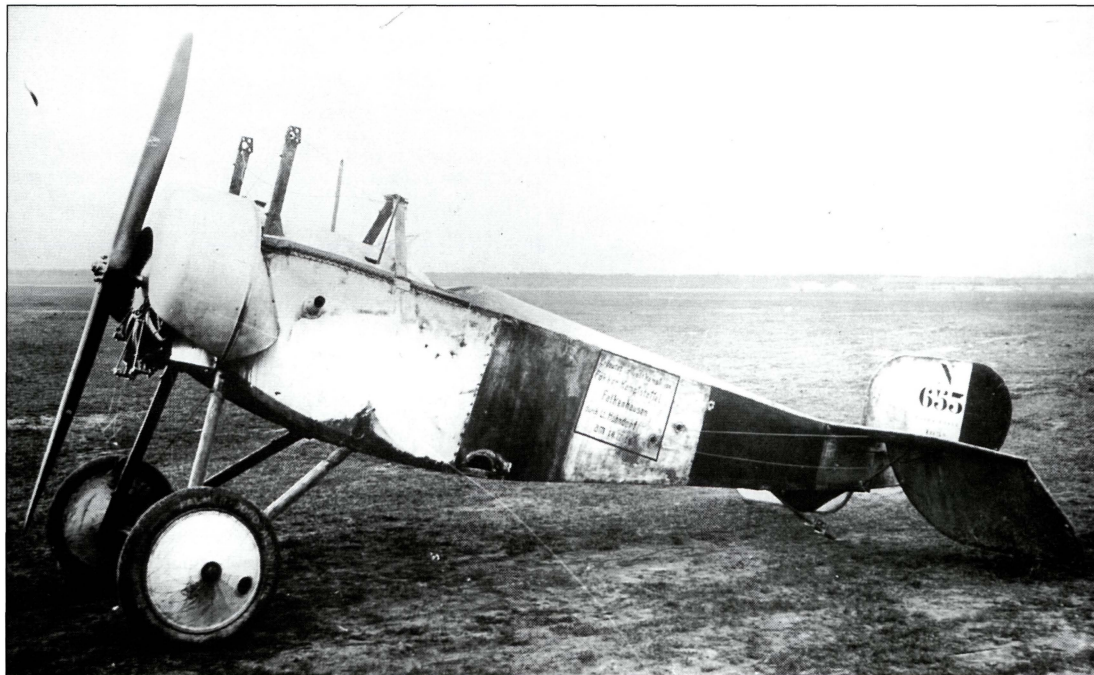
Two days later, however, he ran afoul of Lts J O Andrews and N P Manfield of No 24 Sqn and had a very nasty introduction to the new DH 2;

'I took off about 1100 hrs and met two English biplanes south of Bapaume. I was about 700 metres higher, and therefore came up with them very quickly and attacked one. He seemed to heel over after a few shots, but unfortunately I was mistaken. The two worked splendidly together in the course of the fight and put 11 shots into my machine. The petrol tank, the struts on the fuselage, the undercarriage and the propeller were hit. I could only save myself by a nose-dive of 100 metres. Then at last the two left me alone. It was not a nice business.'

These days Immelman was frequently flying with a Bavarian ex-cavalryman who was beginning to carve out his own reputation, Max Mulzer. Born on 9 July 1893, the young Mulzer was a graduate of the Royal Bavarian Cadet Corps and had been posted to the *Cheveaulegers-Regiment Nr 8* as a *fähnrich* in 1914, only one day after his 21st birthday. Having served bravely in many of the war's first battles on the Western Front, he received his promotion to lieutenant on

Max Mulzer was a comrade of Immelman in FFA 62, and he achieved an unconfirmed victory on 13 March, followed by his first accredited claim on the 30th. This photograph was taken later, and Mulzer appears in the full splendour of his many decorations. In the dark green tunic of his cavalry regiment, the tall and handsome airman was frequently the subject of admiring glances from local French girls, and earned the nickname '*der Monsieur Grün*' ('Mr Green')





13 December. Mulzer's dreams of a daring cavalry career were dashed as static trench warfare developed, and he transferred to the Bavarian Army Air Service on 20 August 1915.

Following pilot training, he flew with *FFA* 4b before coming to *FFA* 62, where he became good friends with Immelman and began flying Fokkers with the unit's fighter detachment. Mulzer had made his first claim, over a Morane, on 13 March, but this had apparently gone unconfirmed. On 30 March he received official credit for a Vickers FB 5 from No 11 Sqn for his first victory (it seems several airmen claimed this machine, which came down behind German lines, and more than one of the claimants received a confirmation).

Mulzer was flying with Immelman on Easter Sunday when they brought down yet another No 11 Sqn 'Gunbus', this one crashing down at Monchy-le-Preux, with the crew again being made PoWs. Later that same Sunday, the Immelman-Mulzer team attacked an FE 2b from No 25 Sqn, which was sent down inside British lines near Estaires with a fatally wounded observer – it seems Immelman was credited with the 'Gunbus', while the FE 2b went to Mulzer for his second confirmed success.

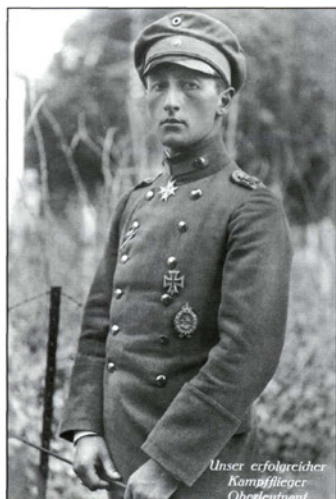
His star on the rise, Mulzer was locally known as 'Bavarian Max' to differentiate him from Immelman, who was called 'Saxon Max'.

While victories were still being gained, April 1916 heralded even more dangerous times for Fokker pilots. On 21 April, Boelcke's 'Sivry Kommando' lost a pilot when Lt n Werner Notzke hit a balloon cable while practice shooting at a ground target and crashed fatally. His loss was offset by the arrival of Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus and Lt n von Hartmann.

The same day that Immelman was shot up by the No 24 Sqn DH 2s (25 April), *KEK* Vaux lost its commander when Rudolf

Walter Höndorf brought down Nieuport N653 intact on 10 April for his third victory. According to the inscription on the fuselage, Höndorf was then flying with *Fokkerstaffel* Falkenhausen. The pilot of this N68 machine was Sous-Lt Marcel Thibergein

Right
This Fokker E IV 183/16 was flown by Oberleutnant Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus, possibly when he was a member of Oswald Boelcke's 'Kommando Sivry' at Verdun in May 1916. The mechanics are making last minute adjustments and priming each cylinder with fuel before starting the Oberursel rotary engine – a labour-intensive task



Another Sanke postcard honoured Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus, who was attached to Boelcke's *Kommando* Sivry in May 1916. By 3 May he had earned six victories, which led to the award of the Knight's Cross with Swords of the Royal Hohenzollern House Order later that summer. This photograph shows von Althaus after he received his 'Blue Max' on 21 July – the day of his eighth victory

Berthold crashed heavily in a Pfalz E IV Wk-Nr 803/15. As noted before, the Pfalz Eindeckers were inferior to the Fokkers in handling and performance, and although powered by the 160 hp Oberursel U III, the Pfalz E IV was no exception. With his score at five, Berthold was out of action for four months due to a broken nose, thigh and pelvis.

On the last day of April, three Fokker pilots died in combat, falling to the ascendant generation of Allied fighters. Nieuport pilot Lt Albert Deullin of N3 got his fourth victory of 20 when he shot down Rittmeister Erich Graf von Holck (who had previously been Manfred von Richthofen's pilot), while Lt Jean Chaput of N31 claimed a Fokker which may have been flown by Vfw Kügler of FFA 3b. On the British front, *KEK* Bertincourt lost Lt Otto Schmedes, possibly to a DH 2 from No 24 Sqn.

May began a bit more auspiciously when Boelcke sent a French aircraft down behind Allied lines for his 15th victory. His comrade von Althaus was also active, claiming two more French two-seaters to bring his score to six by 3 May. Sounding like a schoolmaster happy with his student's progress, Boelcke wrote;

'Althaus flies very decently and goes after his man well – it is great fun flying with him. Unfortunately he is still a bit nervous. He is a very nice brother officer.'

Boelcke continued to set an example of constant flying and fighting, getting a 'double' on the 21st to bring his total to 18 – soon after he was promoted to hauptmann.

JOSEF JACOBS

On 12 May 1916, just three days before his 22nd birthday, the Rhineland-born Josef Jacobs of *Fokkerstaffel-West* achieved his first of a total of more than 40 victories that would place him high indeed on the list of German aces. As a schoolboy in Bonn, Jacobs became fascinated by the early aerial activities he saw at the nearby flying





Ltnd R Josef Jacobs of *Fokkerstaffel West* is seen here standing second from right in this view of his Fokker E III 608/15. The floral wreath commemorated Jacobs' all-important first victory of 12 May 1916. It was also the initial victory for *Fokkerstaffel West* (HAC/UTD)

time he had been flying the unit's 80 hp Fokker E I for over almost two months, and had, in fact, claimed a Caudron on 1 February without confirmation. After a bit of leave in April, Jacobs returned and joined *Fokkerstaffel-West*, which he reported had three 100 hp Fokkers, one 80 hp Pfalz Eindecker and a 'Morane Parasol'. On the evening of 12 May he scrambled in his E III 608/15 to intercept a Caudron that was being shelled by flak near Boissière, catching up with the big G 4 and test-firing his machine gun. Historian Stephen Lawson provides Jacobs' own account;

'I flew directly at my opponent, who wanted to swing away in a big curve back across the lines. My Fokker was a little higher than my opponent, and the large twin-engined Caudron "swished" underneath me while I, flying half on my back, swooped down under full throttle to pepper the Caudron with 30 rounds once I had my opponent exactly in the sight. Having mastered the obligatory loading with my left hand, I could fly with my right hand and keep the Frenchman precisely in view. Apparently the enemy crew became aware of me only when I started to fire. Their aircraft then veered crazily to the left and then to the right – so much that I was unable to get my sight on it again.

'I was a little faster than the Caudron, and I had come a little closer to him through banking than I had wanted. The correct position should have been from above, in the classic attack mode – man against man, stick to stick with the opponent. When I was 50-60 metres from him I centred the Caudron (which again had swung into a banking curve) into my sight and pressed the button on my machine gun to let him have it. It seemed I had hit him, for he dived steeply, half overturned and plunged down followed by me at full throttle.

'I forced him down lower to the ground and was astonished to find he did not fire back at me. I saw as I banked close to the Caudron there was only one man in the machine. He looked at me in sheer terror as I skimmed over him in close proximity in order to force him down even further. This must have sapped his nerves, for as I positioned my Fokker to give him another burst, he disappeared beneath my undercarriage. It was then I thought the Frenchman had crashed into the big woods of Bourguignon.'

Jacobs landed at the nearby field of *FFA* 26 and drove to the crash site, where it was found the pilot had escaped. The next day the pilot, MdL Hulin from C30, was captured, and he confirmed that Jacobs

school in Hangelar. As a teenager, he learned to fly under the tutelage of Bruno Werntgen, and was accepted as a volunteer in the *Fliegertruppe* in 1914. He reported to *FFA* 11 on 3 July 1915, making his first frontline flight that same evening.

Jacobs' skilful flying led to rapid promotion from his initial rank of flieger, and by 6 February 1916 he was a leutnant der reserve. By that

was his victor. On 19 May a happy Jacobs received the iron Cross, First Class as the first pilot from *Fokkerstaffel-West* to successfully destroy an enemy aircraft.

Jacobs was deservedly pleased with his success, but was soon voicing his complaints about the inadequacy of the 100 hp engine in his E III – and he was not alone in this. On the 18th he wrote that his CO, Oblt Hoenmanns (after being chased out of the sky by a Nieuport) reported;

‘It was impossible to challenge a Nieuport when the Frenchman had the advantage of height. To do so’, he asserted, ‘we need better aircraft at the front’.

On 3 June, Jacobs’ diary detailed a report by Boelcke in which the great ace ‘gave his opinion on our fighter aircraft. He said that only a small biplane with a non-rotary engine could accept a fight with the French (because none of our rotary engines are considered useful enough). This is our main complaint’.

The astute and acerbic Rudolf Berthold, in assessing the superiority of the French at Verdun, had this to say;

‘We had too few qualified monoplanes – we lacked an aircraft that was easily manoeuvrable in combat. We had fallen asleep on the laurel wreaths that the single-seaters in the hands of a few superlative pilots had achieved. It was not the monoplane itself, but the pilots who were responsible for the success. One need but compare the number of Fokker fighters at the Front with those few pilots who had victories. I had already requested a new type of aircraft in January 1916 – a small biplane. People laughed!’

‘The Frenchman, meanwhile, takes our experiences to heart, quietly builds small biplanes and then launches hundreds at once against our lines. He has achieved air superiority and, with grinding teeth, we must watch while he shoots down our monoplanes and we’re totally helpless.’

— WINTGENS RETURNS TO THE LISTS —

In spite of this increasing inferiority, determined Fokker pilots were still able to achieve occasional successes. Kurt Wintgens, perhaps the very first successful Fokker flier, had not scored a single confirmed victory since August 1915. He had claimed a Caudron G 4 on 24 January 1916, but failed to receive official confirmation. Wintgens was then sidelined by a long bout of influenza. At some point in May 1916 he was transferred from Bavarian FFA 6 to *Fokkerstaffel Falkenhausen*, which had been established in *Armee Abteilung A* at Bühl. On the 20th Wintgens successfully engaged a Nieuport two-seater from N68 for his fourth official victory, and wrote;



Jacobs is seen here with what is probably a different Fokker E III of *Fokkerstaffel West*. This may well be E III 339/16, which Jacobs picked up from AFP 7 on 9 June 1916. The dappled appearance of the fuselage invites speculation that this machine had some form of camouflage applied at the front (HAC/UTD)

'My fourth was a *Nieuport avion de chasse* of the latest built, and with a new marking on the upper wing – not the usual cockades. At first I thought I had an Englishman before me, and attacked with doubled fury.

'The machine had 80-100 hits and looked partly like a porcupine. The observer was riddled indeed, the pilot had the good fortune to emerge without heavy wounds, in spite of being hit five times, one of these under the left eye – the bullet left at the right eye. I had an interesting discussion with him in the hospital.

'My fifth, the next day, was a twin-engined Caudron. Two Le Rhône engines, two tractor propellers, tailbooms, four rudders, about 20 metre span wings – quite a fellow! From 4000 metres he went down vertically. After the "landing", the engines were 1½ metres in the earth. The crate had automatically disintegrated and was spread out over several square kilometres. Yesterday, the crew were buried with military honours – they had fought gamely to the end.'

Coincidentally, on the British front, Wilhelm Frankl attained his fifth victory on the same day as Wintgens – 21 May. Frankl's victim was an FE 2b from No 20 Sqn RFC, the crew of which survived to be photographed with Frankl. At this time there was no such term as 'ace' in use in the *Fliegertruppe* – a pilot's fifth victory was perhaps not as significant as his fourth, which insured his mention in the official communiqués.

By the end of May 1916, eight Fokker fliers had reached this benchmark – Boelcke had 18, Immelmann 15, von Althaus six victories, Berthold, Frankl and Wintgens five apiece and Parschau and Leffers four each. Buddecke, flying on the Turkish front, had achieved at least seven accredited victories by this time, and had earned the third 'Blue Max' awarded to an airman on 14 April. All of these men were still alive, and (with the exception of the injured Berthold) still flying in search of more victories, acclaim and honours.

On the last day of May, the great Immelmann almost met his end when he led Mulzer and another pilot of FFA 62 into a scrap with a strong formation of five FE 2b pushers and two Martinsydes. Mulzer would get the credit for one of the 'Fees' which landed behind the German lines.

However, as Immelmann was firing the twin guns on his E IV, he suddenly felt a tremendous jolt. The synchronisation gear had malfunctioned (an all-too-frequent occurrence) and the guns had neatly severed one of his propeller blades. The resulting vibrations nearly shook the twin-row Oberursel out of its mountings before Immelmann cut the ignition. He only barely managed to bring the shuddering machine down in one piece.

Immelmann could not know it, but it was an omen of worse to come.

FE 2b 5206 from No 20 Sqn was forced down at Houthem by Wilhelm Frankl on 21 May. The pilot, Capt C E H James, and his observer, Lt H L C Aked, were taken prisoner, and were also photographed with Frankl



THE TIDE TURNS

As noted, until the beginning of June 1916 the lion's share of Fokker Eindecker victories had thus far been scored by Immelmann and Boelcke, with a small number of other pilots having more than one success. By this time both Boelcke and Immelmann were household names in Germany, and almost as famous among Allied airmen. However, as the summer of 1916 continued and the pace of aerial warfare intensified, more up-and-coming fighter pilots would begin to make their names known with increasing scores.

The highly experienced Walter Höhndorf (apparently flying with *KEK Vaux*) was credited with a Caudron for his fourth opponent – generally this is dated as having occurred on 2 June. On the 17th he claimed a Nieuport, which fell in French lines for his fifth victory.

The Nieuport may well have been the aircraft of American volunteer Victor Chapman, a member of *Escadrille N124* (later celebrated as the *Lafayette Escadrille*), who was attacking a brace of German two-seaters when he was jumped by three Fokkers. The Eindecker's fire crippled the Nieuport with bursts that severed the right aileron control rod and creased Chapman's skull – the American managed to return safely, nonetheless. His friends in the *Escadrille* were convinced he had tangled with Boelcke, but Höhndorf is a far more likely candidate.

On 12 July 1916, N124 member James McConnell wrote 'away off across the lines I saw the black 'plane of the famous Capt Bolke. The white crosses stand out very clearly'. Bert Hall, who was another N124 pilot, also wrote that 'I encountered Capt Boelke (sic) daily. He had a Fokker fighter which was painted black with white crosses'. Although Boelcke was indeed based opposite the Americans at Sivry, there is no evidence he ever flew such a highly marked machine.

Boelcke was, in fact, busy. On 12 June he had written in a letter;

'Next week I am to have a *Staffel* composed solely of Fokker single-seaters here, and I shall be its leader. I am to have six machines, and shall be an independent commander. I made no efforts to get this – they pushed it on me against my will. But now that I have taken the job on, I find it great fun, and I shall take care to make it into a very special *Staffel*. I am busy looking round for billets, etc., and mean to establish my own mess as well.'

Kurt Wintgens' sixth victory came the same day that Höhndorf got his fifth (17 June). Wintgens flamed a Farman from MF70 near Bezange La Grande. He wrote;

A pensive Kurt Wintgens contemplates the cowlings of his Fokker E IV (possibly 124/15) with its twin-row Oberursel U III rotary. Wintgens attained his sixth victory by destroying a Farman on 17 June 1916, but the engine of his E IV was hit by defensive fire from the French pusher and had to be sent to the factory for repair



Max Immelmann is pictured with a dazzling array of medals and his Great Dane 'Tyras'. Although he had not yet received it when this photograph was taken, the decoration which mattered the most to Immelmann was the Saxon Commander's Cross, 2nd Class of the Military St Henry Order, granted on 31 March 1916. For a mere oberleutnant, an order in the commander's grade was an unequalled honour



'It was a wonderful fight. He exploded marvellously. He was already behind the French lines when the pilot, who hung dead over the right side, fell burning into the German lines, greeted by a thunderous hurrah from the whole of the front.'

Wintgens noted in the same letter that the worn-out 160 hp engine of his Fokker E IV was going to the factory for overhaul;

'Yesterday it collected a bullet in a too strenuous chase of a Farman. It has earned its place in the factory reasonably, for up to now it has downed one Clerget, two Le Rhône and lastly a 16-cylinder Renault.'

MAX IMMELMANN

Back at Douai in the 6. *Armee*, Immelmann and the rest of KEK 3 (or KEK Douai) were also in a state of transition. Immelmann was meeting frequently with the *Stoffl* of the 6. *Armee*, Major Friedrich Stempel, and succeeded in having the single-seater *Kommando* units placed directly under Army HQ so that they could be deployed in a more methodical manner. The parent formation of KEK Douai, FFA 62, was transferred to the Eastern Front in mid-June. The Fokkers and their pilots would stay at Douai, and Bavarian FFA 5 moved to the Douai airfield to replace the departing two-seaters of 62.

According to Immelmann's brother, and biographer, Franz, he had (like Boelcke) received instructions to form and command his own single-seater '*Staffel*'. However, the effects of 13 months of frontline flying, and the demands of fame and responsibility, had left their mark. Ltn Moosmair, CO of FFA 5b, recalled that Immelmann was very silent and thoughtful during this period, but also that he spoke hopefully of the 'new biplane fighter' which would be arriving soon.

Ltn Erwin Böhme, later CO of *Jagdstaffel* 2 and a 'Blue Max' ace, wrote home that Immelmann had been 'a bundle of nerves lately. Someone should have forced him to really relax for a long time – admittedly, it is hard to find the exact limits of one's endurance'.

After the war, the retired Oblt Dr Ernst Sieverts, a former comrade of Immelmann in FFA 62, wrote a short article about his memories of the great ace. Perhaps it is appropriate to share some of Sievert's reminiscences at this point, presented through the kindness of Peter Grosz and excerpted by the late historian Neal W O'Connor;

'At first, he was not pretentious. Later, after receiving many orders, he became a bit vain. But he was an extraordinary man, his weaknesses were harmless and he was always the dear comrade.

'After the award of the *Pour le Mérite*, he was called "Your exalted Majesty". He loved to have himself photographed each time he got a new medal. He liked to be well dressed on the ground, but when he flew, he wore an old tunic about which he was very superstitious – he attributed his many victories to it, and a pair of old velveteen trousers that he always wore.

'He had a bouncy step, and was given the nickname "the man who always dances" by the local French inhabitants (Immelmann spoke pretty good French). He was very agile and very strong, performing gymnastic feats, and he loved to play tricks and tell jokes.

'He was raised a vegetarian, but in the field he did eat meat, although his real love was "mountains of excellent cake" which he bit

into each afternoon – he was a real trencherman, which was his only vice. Apart from that, he was very frugal.

‘His Great Dane was a “lap dog”, and slept in the same bed as Immelmann.

‘He had it much more difficult than later fighter pilots, because in 1915-16 there was much less aerial activity. His number of victories was not as large as the later fighter pilots, but they were harder earned.’

THE FALL OF AN ACE

Sunday, 18 June 1916 dawned with low clouds that promised a day of little aerial activity. However, the weather had cleared by noon, and in the late afternoon British aircraft were reported to be approaching from the southwest at Arras. Four Fokkers from *KEK* Douai took off to intercept them, led by Immelmann. At about 1700 hrs German time, the Fokkers caught up with a flight of FE 2b two-seater fighters from No 25 Sqn. Armed with a flexible Lewis machine gun for the observer and a fixed forward-firing Lewis for the pilot, the ‘Fees’ could be formidable opponents when flown by an experienced crew.

Immelmann, flying a Fokker E IV (likely 127/16), gained height and dived on FE 2b 6940; his bursts mortally wounded the pilot (Canadian Lt C E Rogers) and also hit the observer, Sgt H Taylor, but not before his Fokker took some serious hits. The big pusher made a forced landing south of Arras – Taylor would survive as a PoW, and Immelmann had what should have been his 16th victory.

Later that afternoon, Mulzer and Österreicher had taken off on another Fokker patrol as Immelmann sat down to mess with the Bavarians of *FFA* 5. His evening meal was interrupted by a report that seven RFC aircraft had crossed the lines near Sallaumines, and his two comrades were already sorely pressed. Immelmann and Wolfgang Heinemann quickly returned to the airfield, but Immelmann’s battle-damaged E IV was still not serviceable. Thus, the great ace took up reserve E III 246/16, while Heinemann flew his own E IV. Vfw Alfred Prehn had already taken off before them.

When Immelmann reached 2000 metres over Loos, he saw an unusually large number of aircraft jockeying for position. About 500 metres above him were the four Fokkers from his *Kommando*, already engaged with another flight of ‘Fees’ from No 25 Sqn. Off to the northeast, two other Fokkers were mixing it up with four British aeroplanes, and over Henin-Liétard, another two monoplanes were preparing to attack the British intruders. German flak was still actively firing. It was a huge air battle for the day, symptomatic of the increasing use of larger formations by both sides.

Immelmann then fired a white flare, signalling the German flak batteries to cease fire as he was about to engage. He dove on FE 2b 4909, and once again his accurate fire riddled the aircraft, wounding both 17-year-old Lt J R B Savage (pilot) and 2AM T Robinson (observer). Although mortally wounded, Savage landed south of Lens.

According to British accounts, another FE 2b crew (2Lt G R McCubbin, with observer Cpl J H Waller) saw Savage’s aircraft in dire straits and dived in to help. Waller opened fire with his Lewis just as Immelmann’s Fokker flew across the ‘Fee’s’ nose. Observers on both

sides saw the Eindecker shudder and begin a 'series of oscillations'. In seconds, the aft portion of the fuselage tore loose from the rest of the aircraft. The forward section of the fuselage fell like a stone as the wings detached, carrying the trapped Immelmann. After a fall of 2000 metres, it smashed into the mud near Sallaumines. The first German soldiers on the scene removed the body from the twisted wreckage, when the pilot's leather flying jacket was opened, they immediately knew it was Immelmann from his *Pour le Mérite*. The body was taken to the Bavarian War Hospital in Douai to be prepared for shipment home.

Major Stempel convened a board of inquiry to determine the cause of the crash. The board failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion, and the controversy over Immelmann's demise has continued to the present day. Naturally, the British gave full credit to McCubbin and Waller. There were rumours on the German side that the E III had been hit by German flak that so weakened the steel tube structure that the Fokker broke apart. Most of Immelmann's comrades, however, firmly believed that he had once again shot off one of his propeller blades through a malfunction of the synchronisation gear, and this time the fatal vibrations had wrenched the craft apart. Photos of the crashed remains show that one of the propeller blades had been practically sawed off in line with the machine gun's path of fire, and this is also attested to by at least one witness, who examined the wreckage. Boelcke simply wrote;

'Immelmann lost his life by a silly chance. All that is written in the papers about a fight in the air is rot. A bit of his propeller flew off – the jarring tore the bracing wires connecting up with the fuselage, and then that broke away.'

Oddly enough, Immelmann is not generally credited with his final two victories on most German lists, and thus is recorded as having 15 instead of the 17 he deserved. In fact, it seems that his close friend Max Mulzer put in a successful claim for the second machine, 4909. He was photographed with the captured FE 2b, and it was credited as his fourth victory.

Immelmann's massive funeral was held in Douai on 22 June, and it was a typically Teutonic event. Crown Prince Georg of Saxony and Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria (commander of the 6. *Armee*)



Two of the many postcards which commemorated the events surrounding Immelmann's death on 18 June. The top view provides a look at FE 2b 4909, this No 25 Sqn aircraft being Immelmann's 17th, and final, victory (although on most lists he is not credited with his last two victories claimed on this fateful day). The 'Fee' was named *Baby Mine*, and its pilot, Lt J R B Savage, was mortally wounded in the encounter, while his observer survived with lesser wounds. The bottom postcard shows the crash site of Immelmann's Fokker E III 246/16

both attended, along with 20 generals. The honour of carrying Immelmann's *Ordenkissen* – a black velvet cushion upon which were displayed his many medals and orders – went to Mulzer. Boelcke flew up from Sivry to be there, and wrote;

'Quite apart from the sad personal loss we have sustained, in my opinion we must not underestimate the effect this will have on the enemy's morale, and the reaction of our own people.'

Indeed, Immelmann's death would have more of an effect on Boelcke's own career than he knew.

Several military historians have stated that Immelmann's death signified the end of the 'Fokker Scourge', both symbolically and in reality, and this conclusion has merit. The very next day another well-known pilot was killed in a Fokker, Hptm Ernst *Freiherr* von Gersdorff, the leader of *Kagohl* I, being shot down. He may have been another victim of the Nieuport ace Jean Chaput of N57.

On 25 June the Fokker pilot Ltn Erwin Tütschulte of FFA 23 was killed, falling victim to an FE 2b. It was clear that the Nieuport 11 and the new British fighters were superior to the Eindecker, and the demise of such a successful Fokker exponent as Immelmann could not have inspired confidence in other German pilots.

On the other hand, the new generation of German biplane fighters was just starting to reach the front. Boelcke had hung around *KEK* Douai for a few days after the funeral so as to have the chance to fly against the British again. He used the opportunity to try out one of the new Halberstadt D-types – intended for Immelmann, it had arrived at Douai on 22 June. Boelcke wrote;

'One evening I flew the new Halberstadt biplane – the first appearance of this type at the front. As it looks somewhat like an English BE. I managed to spring a complete surprise on an Englishman. I got within 50 metres of him unrecognised and gave his jacket a good dusting.'

Boelcke broke off the combat when his gun belt jammed.

By late June Boelcke had returned to Sivry, on the French front, where some of his fellow Fokker fliers were still managing to make life difficult for their opponents, despite their inferior machines. The American volunteers of *Escadrille* N124 again encountered Fokkers on the 23rd, an afternoon patrol of four Nieuports tangling with five German machines northeast of Douaumont. A short skirmish ensued, and four of the Nieuport pilots broke off and returned to their field at Behonne. Unknown to them, Sgt Victor Chapman – his head still bandaged from his Fokker scrap on the 17th – had not disengaged.

The crew of a French Maurice Farman later stated that they had observed a single Nieuport that was chasing a German fighter come under attack from three more Fokkers. The Nieuport went down out



The tangled wreckage of Fokker E III 246/16 was collected for evaluation and study in an attempt to determine the true cause of Immelmann's death. The one remaining arm of the propeller appears neatly severed in line with the machine gun barrel, providing support for the view that faulty synchronisation had caused the crash. The aft portion of the fuselage had broken away and remained nearly intact, and the Wk-Nr 545 was stencilled neatly on the elevator



On 23 June Kurt Wintgens shot down Sgt Victor Chapman of *Escadrille N124*, the famous unit of American volunteers based at Béhonne, for his seventh victory. Seen here with his Fokker E IV (likely 124/15), Wintgens went on to destroy a Farman on 30 June for his eighth success. This earned him the *Pour le Mérite*, which is just visible here around his neck

of control and broke up in the air, crashing at Haumont, near Samoneux, inside German lines. Wintgens claimed Chapman's Nieuport 16 1334 as his seventh victory.

Two days later Wintgens' good friend Walter Höhdorf destroyed a Caudron of *Escadrille C9* for his seventh victim. The Caudron went down in flames at Raucourt, and the crew of Cpl Bresch and Sous-Lt Joseph Ransom both perished. It is reported that Höhdorf

transferred to *KEK Vaux* in the 2. *Armee* in late June, where he would serve alongside Wilhelm Frankl.

Both Höhdorf and Wintgens had recently been awarded the Knight's Cross with Swords of the Royal Hohenzollern House Order – the award that generally preceded the *Pour le Mérite*. Otto Parschau was also active, and after his sixth victory on 1 July he too would receive the 'Hohenzollern'. All three were nearing the 'magic number' (for the time) of eight victories. Wintgens would win the race by downing a Farman on the last day of June. His own blue-enamelled cross was awarded the next day – he was the fourth German airman honoured with the order. Hans-Joachim Buddecke, flying in Turkey, had received the *Pour le Mérite* the previous 14 April following a number of victories scored in that distant locale.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Throughout the first half of 1916 the French urged their British allies to launch a major offensive that would relieve German pressure on Verdun. Consequently, the year saw a massive build-up of the British Expeditionary Force, including the RFC, in preparation for an attack in the sector of the British Fourth Army, just north of the River Somme, where the two Allied armies joined. Fourteen divisions would be deployed in the initial assault, supported by five French divisions to the south of the Somme.

The RFC began its reconnaissance and bombing campaign in the region well in advance of the offensive, which was scheduled for 1 July. The RFC units supporting the Fourth Army included 108 aircraft of IV Brigade and 58 of the 9th Wing, totalling 167 aeroplanes. Significantly, 76 of these were new fighters – the French had accumulated slightly more than the British for their part in the battle.

To combat this overwhelming force the German 2. *Armee* had only 104 aeroplanes and six balloons in this sector, as a large portion of the German aerial strength was still concentrated at Verdun. Of these aeroplanes, only 16 were single-seat fighters, concentrated in two *Kommandos*. One was *KEK Nord* at Bertincourt, also known as *Abwehrkommando Nord* or *KEK B* (for Bertincourt) – this was Gustav Leffers' unit. The other was *KEK Süd* at Château Vaux, also known as *KEK Vaux*.

The majority of the fighters available were Fokker monoplanes that were outclassed by the newer Allied types. A few of the new biplane fighters were on hand (pilots Leffers and Diemer of *KEK B* both acquired a Halberstadt D II on 28 June), but the German pilots were still at a tactical disadvantage due to the shortcomings of the *KEK* organisation. Possessing a three-to-one numerical superiority and technically advanced aircraft, the Allies would seize control of the skies over the Somme battlefield and retain it for weeks.

When Boelcke had returned to Sivry to continue preparation of his new six-aircraft fighter *Staffel*, he had a surprise waiting. He wrote;

‘There I found a telegram – “Hauptmann Boelcke is to report at once to the *Chef des Feldflugwesens*”. Great was my joy, because I firmly believed I was going to get transferred to the 2. *Armee*, where the English Offensive was just beginning.’

Boelcke’s ambitions were dashed, however, when he reported to the *Feldflugchef* in Charleville. After the loss of Immelmann, the possibility of losing Germany’s other great aerial hero was too bitter a blow to contemplate, and Boelcke was taken off flight status. He was furious, but nothing could be done. Boelcke was given the choice of a desk job organising a ‘crowd of weak-kneed pilots in need of rest’ in Charleville, or to go on an official mission to Turkey and the Balkans. Boelcke chose the latter and began packing his bags.

Determined to get in as much flying as possible before his posting, he made two sorties late in the evening of 27 June. On the second patrol he found five French aircraft in the darkening skies over Douaumont. Despite the dim light, he attacked and was credited with a Nieuport for his 19th victory. He then left for the East. Thus, just when Germany’s best aerial tactician and combat leader was needed at the Somme, he was absent from the front. Boelcke wrote;

‘The worst of the whole business is that I am put out of action just at the very moment when on account of the English offensive the enemy’s flying activity is more intensive than ever before, and my experience and ability might have been able to help our lot a bit!’

On 1 July, the opening day of the battle, Max Mulzer was posted to Gustav Leffers’ unit in the 2. *Armee*, variously known as *AKN* (*Abwehrkommando Nord*) or simply *KEK Nord* – it was still associated with *FFA 32*. Mulzer brought with him a record of six victories and a recommendation for the ‘Hohenzollern’, and would certainly bolster the unit’s strength at a time when it was sorely needed.

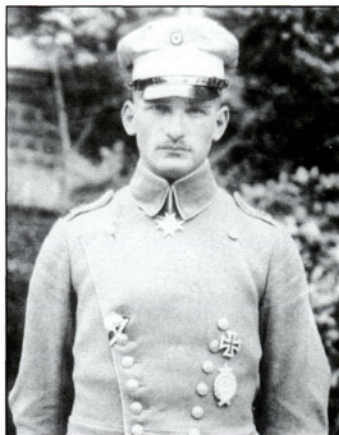
The day Mulzer arrived, Vfw Walter Dittrich broke the formation’s lengthy dry spell (the last victory had come on 31 March) by using an E III to down a No 22 Sqn FE 2b over Cléry-Longueval. The succeeding day Mulzer announced his presence on the Somme by torching a No 9 Sqn BE 2c for his seventh victory. The aircraft fell near Miraumont. Two days later, Mulzer’s ‘Hohenzollern’ came through, which was no doubt a cause for celebration.

Poor weather severely restricted flying on the Somme front from the 4th to the 6th, but on the 7th there was renewed action over Bertincourt. At 0645 hrs, four British aircraft appeared over the *AKN* airfield, and Leffers and Uffz Leopold Reimann took off in their Fokkers to engage them. The superiority of the RFC aircraft was all



Oswald Boelcke poses with his ‘Blue Max’ glistening at his collar. He was hoping to be transferred to the 2. *Armee* to help organise the aerial response to the British Somme offensive, but instead he was angered to learn he was being sent on a tour of the Eastern Front

Max Mulzer was temporarily transferred to *FFA 32*’s fighter detachment *Abwehr Kommando Nord* on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. He showed his mettle the next day by earning his seventh victory, and his *Pour le Mérite* came through on 8 July – the day he destroyed a No 8 Sqn BE 2c. His report read, ‘I began to fire almost at the same moment as the (enemy’s) first shot hit my machine. I fired 80-100 rounds, made a sharp right-hand turn and then saw how the English biplane went down in very tight spirals, crashing on the northern edge of Miraumont’





The commander of the *Fokkerstaffel* of AOK 3 was Oblt Kurt Student, seen here with his Fokker E IV. Student called this machine his 'faithful Fokker', and stated he earned three of his six victories in it. His *Fokkerstaffel* would later form the basis of *Jasta 9*, and Student would command that unit as well. In World War 2 he became a Luftwaffe oberstgeneral and commanded the German airborne forces (HAC/UTD)

On 6 July Kurt Student (seen in his flying kit) forced down this Nieuport 11 (1324) near Péronne for his first confirmed claim. He then had a synchronised LMG 08 machine gun fitted and German markings applied, and apparently flew it in combat. At this point it still bore its original French camouflage (HAC/UTD, information courtesy M Thiemeyer)



too evident in the ensuing contest, as all the British machines escaped and the two Fokker pilots returned with empty guns.

On 6 July, meanwhile, a different Fokker pilot had achieved his first of six eventual successful claims. Oblt Kurt Student was in charge of the *Fokkerstaffel* assigned to *Armee-Oberkommando 3* at the southeastern edge of the Somme battle line. Born on 12 May 1890 in Birkholz, in Brandenburg, Student had first served in *FFA 17* on the Eastern Front, before taking command of the *Fokkerstaffel* on 1 June 1916. On 6 July Student downed Nieuport 11 1324 flown by Lt Jean Raty of N38. Although he was wounded, Raty managed to perform a safe landing behind German lines.

The Nieuport was brought to the *Fokkerstaffel* airfield and was soon adorned with German national insignia. Recognising an opportunity when he saw one, Student had the Nieuport fitted with a synchronised 'Spandau' gun, and apparently flew the machine in combat.

Back at *AKN*, Max Mulzer was in hot pursuit of the *Pour le Mérite*, and he realised this ambition with his eighth victory on 8 July. Attacking a BE 2c from No 4 Sqn on a photographic reconnaissance mission, Mulzer fired 80-100 rounds at it. The riddled biplane crashed on the outskirts of Miramont, and only the observer survived as a prisoner. The award of Mulzer's 'Blue Max' seemed to herald a time of intense activity at *AKN* as the Somme battle ground on.

On 9 July, just as *Abwehrkommando Nord* was celebrating Mulzer's achievement, two pilots from *Kagohl I* were posted in to further increase the unit's offensive potential during the British offensive. The accomplished Fokker ace Lt Otto Parschau arrived with his recent seventh victory confirmed (a balloon on the 3rd), which had brought him his own 'Hohenzollern'. His comrade Lt Werner Schramm came as well, a veteran *Fokkerflieger* with considerable experience on the Verdun front. Parschau wasted no time at all, taking to the air within hours of his arrival and flaming another balloon. Now he, too, had his eighth victory, and his name could be proposed for the *Pour le Mérite*.

On 10 July the announcement of Parschau's 'Blue Max' came through. Four days later *AKN* was officially separated from *FFA 32* and became a self-contained unit under the direct command of *AOK 2*, with Parschau as its leader.

On 19 July a significant development took place as the German 2. *Armee* was divided into two armies. The sector south of the Somme was still designated as the 2. *Armee*, but the former part of the 2. *Armee* north of the Somme was re-designated as the new 1. *Armee*. Hauptmann Haehnelt, the previous *Stoffl* for the 5. *Armee* at Verdun, now took that position for the 1. *Armee*. The fighting at Verdun had stagnated into a defensive posture for the German forces there, so all available troops were transferred to the endangered Somme sector.



KEK Süd (also known as *Abwehrkommando Süd*, or *AKS*), or *KEK Vaux*, was in the 2. *Armee* in the thick of the Somme battle. By this time it appears Walter Höhndorf was flying with the unit, and on 15 July he succeeded in bringing down Nieuport 16 1392 of *Escadrille* N62 near Athies, south of Péronne. This was his eighth victory, and his own 'Blue Max' was announced on the 20th – he was the sixth *Pour le Mérite* airman. By that time Höhndorf had already chalked up his ninth victim, a Farman of *Escadrille* F207, which also fell near Péronne on 19 July.

Like Höhndorf, Kurt Wintgens was not resting on his *Pour le Mérite* laurels, and remained active in the hotly contested skies over the Somme. His unit affiliation at this time is a bit unclear, although he was certainly flying in the area of the new 1. *Armee*. On the same day that Höhndorf claimed his ninth victim, Wintgens tied with him by downing one of the new Sopwith 1½ Strutters. The Strutter was another well-armed and capable aircraft in the British stable, equipped with a synchronised Vickers machine gun for the pilot and a moveable Lewis gun for the observer. Wintgens' victim was a machine from No 70 Sqn, which fell near Cambrai.

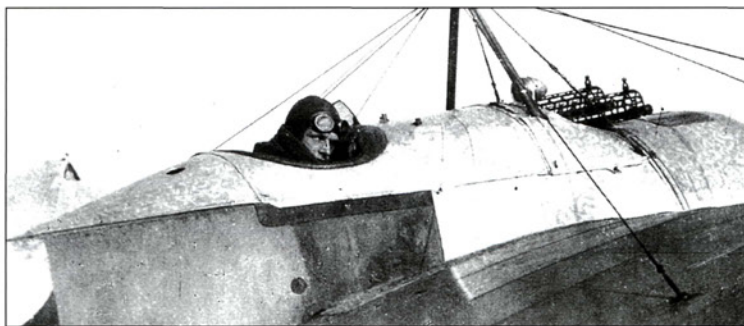
On 21 July – a day of intense and bitter aerial combat over the Somme – Höhndorf received credit for a Nieuport south of Bapaume, thus entering the double-digit column with his tenth victory. Not to be outdone, Wintgens racked up a double on the same day, claiming a BE 2c from No 12 Sqn in the morning and a Morane N from No 60 Sqn in the afternoon. Also on the 21st, Ernst von Althaus downed a French aircraft over Roye for his eighth victory, qualifying yet another *Eindeckerflieger* for the 'Blue Max'.

In spite of these victories, 21 July was a black day for the *Fliegertruppe*, especially the Fokker pilots of *AKN*. Confusingly, it was about this time that *AKN* was renamed *Kampfeinsatzstaffel B* (for Bertincourt), and some sources even revert to using *KEK B* for the unit. The RFC claimed six German aircraft destroyed and three more 'driven down' on 21 July. Of these,

At some later point, Student had his Nieuport 11 repainted in a very pale colour. New wheel décor and a crossed sword emblem were also added. Student is seen with his left hand on the wing of his trusty Fokker E IV and his right hand on the propeller of the Nieuport. Seated between the wheels is Gefr Schaller and sat on the wheel is Vfw Szypa (*HAC/UTD*, information courtesy M Thiemeyer)

Otto Parschau reportedly flew this Fokker Eindecker, but the date and locale have not been confirmed. The warm clothing suggests late 1915/early 1916 when he was with *Kagohl 1*. Note the rack of signal flare cartridges affixed to the side of the cockpit and the apparent black/white wheel cover décor. On 9 July Parschau was posted to *AKN* to beef up the unit's fighting strength during the Somme battle





Wasting little time, Parschau torched a kite balloon from the 55e *Compagnie des Aerostiers* on the same day he arrived at AKN. This photo of Parschau shows him in his Fokker E IV at Verdun, prior to his arrival at AKN. This aircraft is most likely prototype 122/15, which Parschau test-flew at the Fokker factory in November 1915. It is unknown what type of aircraft Parschau was flying on 9 July when he posted his eighth victory, but it may well have been an early Halberstadt biplane

Ltn Walter Höndorf appears relaxed as he reclines on the fuselage of his Fokker E IV, but the original photograph was captioned '*Höchste Startbereitschaft!*', which indicates that the aircraft was on standby for immediate take-off. The date and location of this photo are unknown, but it may originate from Höndorf's time in *KEK* Vaux (also known as *KEK Süd*) in the summer of 1916. He achieved his highly anticipated eighth victory on 15 July during the Somme battle



one was Vfw Wolfgang Heine-mann of *KEK* 3 at Douai, Immelmann's old wingman falling in a fight with No 23 Sqn's FE 2b fighters.

At some point in the day the commander of *KEK* B, Otto Parschau, ran into trouble over Grévillers. He received a glancing shot to his head and a mortal bullet wound in his

chest. Incredibly, he managed to bring his aircraft (possibly a new Halberstadt D II) down safely behind German lines and was rushed to a field hospital, but died on the operating table that evening. That same day his comrade Ltn Werner Schramm was reportedly hit in the chest by shrapnel and fell near Combles.

Unfortunately the time of Parschau's fatal combat is not recorded, thus clouding the question of exactly who shot him down. Both the DH 2 ace Capt J O Andrews of No 24 Sqn (who claimed a Fokker over Allaines in the morning) and the French star Lt Charles Nungesser have been put forth as the possible victor over Parschau. Nungesser's tenth claim was for an 'Aviatik', a term often used by the French for any generic German aircraft (as mentioned, Parschau may have been flying a new Halberstadt fighter, which would have been an unfamiliar type).

At any rate, another *Pour le Mérite* hero was dead. Parschau and Schramm were buried side-by-side in the military cemetery near St Quentin, in an elaborate and impressive joint funeral.

Parschau's death placed another exclamation point on the end of any semblance of German control of the air over the Somme. The unfortunate German ground troops, suffering from what seemed like incessant Allied air attacks and air-directed artillery fire, swore 'God punish England, our artillery and our airmen'.

In his post-war memoirs, the perceptive commander of *Idflieg* (the Inspectorate of Aviation Troops), *Oberstleutnant* Wilhelm Siegert, hit the nail on the head when he wrote;

'The start of the Somme battle unfortunately coincided with the low point in the technical development of our aircraft. The unquestioned air supremacy we had enjoyed in early 1916 by virtue of our Fokker monoplane fighters had shifted over to the enemy's Nieuports, Vickers and Sopwiths in March and April.'

In the term 'Vickers' aircraft, Siegert was using a common German misnomer for any of the RFC's pusher fighters such as the DH 2 and FE 2b.



Ernst Freiherr von Althaus readies for take-off in his Fokker E IV, possibly 183/16. Note the personal marking of a black(?) star painted on the white wheel cover. On 21 July von Althaus reached the 'Blue Max' benchmark of eight when he downed a French aircraft

While determined pilots like Wintgens and Höhndorf were still obtaining occasional victories, by and large the Germans consistently failed to prevent RFC squadrons from accomplishing their reconnaissance and bombing missions.

The one bright spot on the horizon for the hard-pressed German fighter pilots was the gradual appearance of a new generation of biplane fighters, the first examples of which were the Halberstadt D II and D III machines.

The Halberstädter Flugzeugwerke GmbH had constructed two fighter prototypes in the late Autumn of 1915. By 8 March 1916 the company received authorisation to proceed with the construction of 12 new fighters, powered by a 120 hp engine. Machines powered by the 120 hp Mercedes D II were designated as the Halberstadt D II, and some 96 would eventually be built. The Halberstadt D III powerplant was the 120 hp Argus As II engine, and 50 of this type were constructed. Both types were armed with a single synchronised machine gun mounted on the starboard side.

By the end of June 1916, eight Halberstadt fighters were recorded at the front, a number which grew to 25 two months later. The type met with acclaim and success after its arrival, as exemplified by an *Idflieg* report dated 11 July 1916;

'The Halberstadt with the 120 hp Mercedes engine has flown at the Front with good results and is well regarded – especially praised are its ability to climb and manoeuvre. It is decidedly preferred to the 160 hp Fokker (E IV). However everyone urgently requests twin machine guns, but this will lead to a corresponding reduction in performance.'

Even Anthony H G Fokker realised that the development of his Eindecker design had been exploited to its zenith, and in early 1916 his firm was busily designing and evaluating a gaggle of biplane prototypes. Fokker brought out the D I, powered by the 120 hp Mercedes and mounting a single machine gun. More than 80 D I fighters were ordered, but due to disastrous wing failures and a disappointing performance the type saw little service.

Marginally more successful was the Fokker D II, powered by the 100 hp Oberursel U I. Some 180+ D II fighters were purchased by the *Fliegertruppe*, in spite of their antiquated wing-warping control system and limited combat effectiveness. The Fokker D III with the 160 hp Oberursel U III twin-row rotary and two guns was perhaps the best of the early Fokker biplanes – 210 D III fighters were eventually built and delivered.



Otto Parschau posed for this shot in the brief period between 10 July (the date of his 'Blue Max') and his death on 21 July. After Immelmann, Parschau was the second Eindecker ace and *Pour le Mérite* winner to die. He would not be the last





The first examples of the new breed of Halberstadt biplane fighters arrived at the front in June 1916 – here, Kurt Wintgens peers at the camera from his D II. Note the translucent appearance of the upper wing. Wintgens destroyed his 12th opponent on 30 July, and he may very well have been flying a Halberstadt at the time. This photograph may otherwise have been taken during his later service in *Jasta 1* (L *Bronnenkant*)

In a grim scene typical of many wartime photo albums, Kurt Wintgens (marked with a white 'X') poses in front of the wreckage of what is likely his 13th victory, attained on 2 August. On that date he shot down Morane BB 5177 from No 60 Sqn. One of the unfortunate crew members is seen in the foreground (N *Franks*)



The sun was setting on the Eindecker, and in May 1916 *Idflieg* ordered 104 of the new D-type fighters (80 Fokker and 24 Halberstadt), and the next month ordered 266 more. However, the new biplanes arrived in insufficient numbers and too late to have much of an effect on the contest for aerial supremacy over the Somme. At the end of August there were still 124 monoplane fighters recorded in the frontline

inventory (95 Fokker and 29 Pfalz) and only 56 of the new D-types.

In the absence of more specific records, it is often difficult to know what particular type of aircraft a pilot was using in this transitional period, but most of the active aces were almost certainly still flying Fokker monoplanes (generally E IVs by this time).

On 22 July Max Mulzer racked up his ninth victory east of Hulloch. Two days later, up-and-coming Saxon pilot Hartmut Baldamus scored a double by downing two French machines in the Verdun sector. The Dresden-born Baldamus was apparently flying a Fokker with *FFA 20*, and this brace of victories brought his tally to four. He would continue to score, raising his total to 18, until killed in action on 14 April 1917.

On 30 July the dependable duo of Walter Höhndorf of *KEK Süd* and his friend Kurt Wintgens were once again successful over the Somme battlefield. A formation of Martinsyde G 100s from No 27 Sqn was on a bombing mission to Epehy in the afternoon when two German 'scouts' attacked. One of the British airmen recalled that the enemy aircraft skilfully cut in between the three escort machines and attacked the four bombers. Wintgens' victim went down east of Péronne and Höhndorf's Martinsyde fell to earth north of Bapaume. 2Lt L N Graham was wounded and made a PoW while Lt E R Farmer was captured unhurt.

Wintgens was on a hot streak, scoring again just three days later on 2 August (one day past his 22nd birthday). His 13th opponent was likely Morane BB biplane 5177 from No 60 Sqn, which went down near Pouilly. No 60 Sqn had set out to bomb Estrées, but paid dearly. Another Morane (5181) was also shot down, apparently falling to Wilhelm Frankl of *KEK Süd* as his seventh success. The crews of both aircraft perished.

At around this time Max Mulzer, Immelmann's old friend and wingman, apparently left his temporary posting to *Kampfstaffel B* and is thought to have returned to familiar territory with *KEK 3* at Douai. On 3

August he entered the double-digit column at the expense of his old opponents of No 25 Sqn. At Sallaumines, near Lens, Mulzer sent FE 2b 4272 flaming to earth at 0730 hrs German time. 2Lt K Mathewson and Private E M Des Brisay, both Canadians, lost their lives at Mulzer's hands. Oddly enough, the 6. *Armee Flugmeldbucher* credits Mulzer with a further victory on 9 August, but this does not seem to have been officially confirmed and his score remained at ten.

At any rate, on 3 September Mulzer received his home state of Bavaria's highest military honour – the Knight's Cross of the Military-Max-Joseph Order. This knighthood was awarded in an impressive ceremony at his airfield, with a military band playing. From then on he was Max *Ritter* von Mulzer.

On the French front the *Fokkerstaffel* of AOK 3 was still managing to inflict losses on the enemy, even with their Fokker monoplanes. On 6 August Vfw Hermann Pfeiffer achieved his all-important first victory by downing Caudron 1467 of *Escadrille* C56, crewed by Sous-Lt J Verdie and Lt Escolle.

Badener Pfeiffer was born on 24 July 1890. When war began he was already into his one-year tour of duty with the 6. *Badisches Infanterie Regiment 'Kaiser Friedrich III', Nr 114*. He obtained a transfer to the *Fliegertruppe* and initiated his pilot training in July 1915. In March 1916 Pfeiffer was posted to reconnaissance unit FFA 10, allocated to *Armee-Oberkommando 3*. On 30 July he had his wishes fulfilled when he joined the *Fokkerstaffel* assigned to that HQ, led by Oblt Kurt Student. Pfeiffer's first victory gained him the Iron Cross, First Class, and he was on his way to all-too-brief fame as a *Jagdflieger*.

Mixed fortunes followed for Pfeiffer's *Fokkerstaffel*. On 8 August his CO, Oblt Student, shot down a Nieuport two-seater from N38 north of St Souplet for his third successful claim – pilot Lt H de Fels made a forced landing behind French lines with his wounded observer, Sous-Lt Emile Deviterne. In the same combat, however, N38's Sous-Lt Marcel Burguin (apparently flying a single-seat Nieuport fighter) avenged his comrades by sending the Eindecker of Ltn Benno Berneis of the *Fokkerstaffel* down in flames.

The death of yet another *Eindeckerflieger* at the hands of a Nieuport pilot was indicative of the disintegrating potency of German fighter formations as the Somme battle continued into its second deadly phase. Although the number of fighters on the 1. and 2. *Armee* fronts was increased to 60 by the end of August, they were still hampered by inefficient organisation. By that time, however, important changes were already underway that would have far-reaching effects.

On 11 August 1916, Oswald Boelcke was a long way from the crisis on the Somme. He was still on his enforced tour of the Macedonian and Turkish theatres, and had just arrived in Kovel (now in Ukraine), on the Russian Front. He was there in part to visit his elder brother Wilhelm, who was then CO of *Kampfstaffel* 10 in *Kagohl 2*. Awaiting Boelcke in Kovel was an urgent telegram from the *Feldflugchef* Hermann von der Lieth-Thomsen;

'Return to Western Front as quickly as possible to organise and lead *Jagdstaffel* 2 on the Somme.'

An entirely new era was beginning.



Kurt Wintgens is a study in intensity as he discusses his 13th victory with onlookers on 2 August 1916 (N Franks)

One of Kurt Student's pilots in the *Fokkerstaffel* of AOK 3 was Vfw Hermann Pfeiffer. On 6 August he downed a Caudron for his first victory. Pfeiffer would score three more times before his unit became *Jasta* 9, and would add a further seven victories with that formation. He died on 20 May 1917, test-flying a captured Nieuport 17



JAGDSTAFFELN

TAKE FLIGHT

Even before he had left upon his 'holiday' tour, Boelcke had planted the seed for the development of permanent fighter units. In late June 1916, after he had received his orders to head for the Eastern Front, he spent his final days at Charleville meeting with *Feldflugchef* Thomsen, who wrote;

'Boelcke then spent several days with my staff cooperating closely with our experts in establishing the basic principles of scout flying, and making preparations for the further development of this new arm.'

Boelcke's biographer *Professor Dr Johannes Werner* recorded that;

'Boelcke emphasised the opinion – which his recent experiences at Douai had strengthened – that it would not suffice to merely form a number of pilots into a company of single-seater fighters – on the contrary, it was most essential to train all members of a *Staffel* to cooperation by strict discipline, and thus organise aerial warfare.'

The fertile mind of *Oberstleutnant* Thomsen took these ideas, expanded and crystallised them. On 10 August 1916 the *Feldflugchef* ordered the formation of the first *Jagdstaffeln*. The *Jagdstaffel* or *Jasta* was a permanent formation, with a planned establishment of 14 aircraft (an ideal figure that was not always reached). The *Jagdstaffeln* were created for the purpose of carrying out diligent attacks on enemy aeroplanes and balloons, and they were organised at this time, of course, primarily in an attempt to regain aerial superiority on the Somme front. *Jagdstaffeln* 1, 2 and 5 would be formed in the 1. *Armee*, while 2. *Armee* *Staffeln* would include 3, 4 and 6.

It is beyond the scope of this book to detail the exploits of all of the early *Jagdstaffel* pilots. After an initial period with diverse equipment, most of the *Staffeln* would be equipped with the powerful Albatros D I and D II fighters (this subject is well-covered in *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 32 - Albatros Aces of World War 1*). Rather, this chapter will examine the further experiences of some of the notable aces already introduced, as they flew a variety of monoplanes and early D-types in the formative days of *Jagdstaffel* tactics.

The introduction of the initial *Jagdstaffeln* was not an immediate process, in spite of the desperate state of affairs on the Somme. The early *Staffeln* were generally formed from cadres of veteran fighter pilots attached to *FFA* and *Kampfgeschwader* formations, most of whom were already flying with non-permanent fighter detachments. Some *Jagdstaffeln* were created from an existing *KEK* with an increase in numbers and a name change, while others were entirely new units.

Most of the available fighters were Fokker monoplanes, with a scattering of Fokker and Halberstadt D-type biplanes. The lack of available D category machines is probably one of the reasons why the

Jagdstaffeln took so long to become operational. Another shortage existed in the roster of pilots with fighter aircraft experience and training in the strenuous flying required of a *Jagdflieger*.

Jagdstaffel 1

The 1. *Armee* unit known as *Abwehr-Kommando-Nord* had been renamed *Kampfeinsatzstaffel B* (sometimes abbreviated as *KESt B* or *KEK B*) around the time Otto Parschau fell on 21 July. No victories had been recorded since 9 July. However, on 10 August the *Feldflugchef* order authorised the formation of *Jagdstaffel 1* – this unit was to be composed largely of personnel on the roster of *Kampfeinsatzstaffel B*, together with additional men from *AFP 1* and various two-seater units in the 1. *Armee*.

The unit was formed at Bertincourt on 22 August under the command of Hptm Martin Zander, an experienced airman from *Kagohl 1* with two victories scored as a two-seater pilot. In addition to the cadre of experienced pilots from the former *AKN*, two other ‘stars’ were eventually posted in to the unit – Ltn Kurt Wintgens and Ltn d R Walter Höhndorf. The roster also included Gustav Leffers and four others destined for ‘ace’ status – Oblts Erich Hahn and Hans Bethge, Ltn Hans von Keudell and Offz Stv Max Müller.

The *Jasta* flew its aircraft to Bertigny on 24 August and immediately began conducting patrols from that field. Records of the aircraft in use by the *Staffel* at this time are fragmentary and confusing, and it is generally thought that the unit’s first aircraft were Fokker D I biplanes. There are also certainly photographs of pilots with Halberstadt machines, and there is considerable evidence that Kurt Wintgens flew a Fokker E IV at times. When Leopold Rudolf Reimann transferred to *Jasta 2* from *Jasta 1* on 1 September, he reportedly brought his unit’s solitary Albatros D I along with him.

At any rate, the unit opened its record books on the first day of operations, when Reimann bagged a Sopwith 1½ Strutter from No 70 Sqn on 24 August. Two Strutters were damaged by German flak fire and were then attacked by *Jasta 1* fighters. Capt R G Hopwood and Gunner C R Pearce were both killed when their two-seater came down at around 1830 hrs east of Metz-en-Couture,

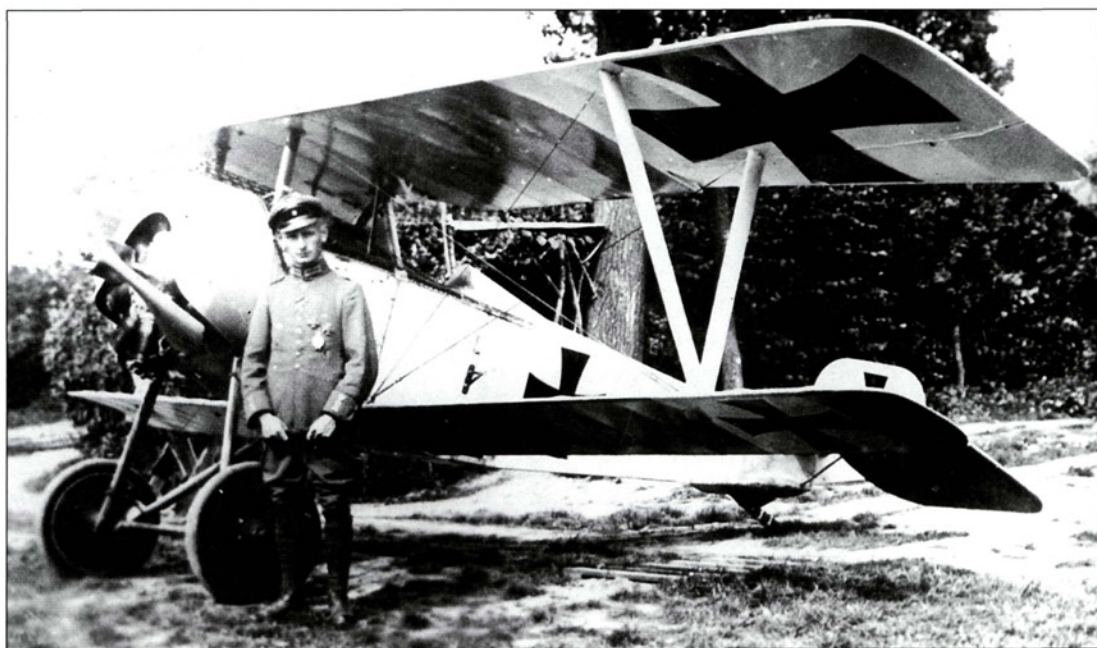
The next day *Jastaführer* Zander kept the scoring run going by forcing down an aircraft from No 22 Sqn, which landed near Gueudecourt with a riddled fuel tank. The crew became guests of the Kaiser for the duration. A second No 22 Sqn FE 2b was damaged during the same fight, but returned safely – the crew reported that they had been attacked by two or three Fokkers.

Jasta 1 was enjoying a productive period, and 28 August brought the opportunity for another pilot to chalk up his first confirmed victory. Berlin-born Oblt Hans Bethge found a BE 2c from No 15 Sqn on an artillery observation patrol over Auchonvillers at roughly 1200 hrs German time. He shot it down just inside British lines, killing the crew of Lt R Burleigh and 2Lt R C Harry.

The final day of August was a stellar one for the new *Jasta*. In the morning at least three aircraft from the *Staffel* engaged a flight of

Ltn Hans von Keudell was a founder member of *Jagdstaffel 1*, earning his first victory on 31 August 1916. He would add ten more before being transferred to the command of *Jasta 27* in early February 1917, where he fell in combat on the 15th of that month





Martinsydes from No 27 Sqn and did great execution. At 0800 hrs Hans von Keudell drew first blood when he downed Martinsyde G 100 7287 over Havrincourt Wood for his initial victory, the pilot being captured. Apparently a running battle ensued, for 15 minutes later Hans Bethge brought down another No 27 Sqn machine, resulting in a second RFC pilot entering captivity. At 0840 hrs Gustav Leffers got back in the scoring column by destroying G 100 7482, killing the pilot. A fourth aircraft from No 27 Sqn went down to a Roland C II crew of *Kampfstaffel 1*, *Kagohl 1*.

With six victories, Leffers was now in line for the 'Hohenzollern'. As if to emphasise his qualifications, he added a No 23 Sqn FE 2b on the morning of 3 September for his seventh. The crew of 2Lt F D H Sams and Cpl W Summers were both captured near Bapaume. To further muddle the confused record of *Jasta 1* aeroplanes, after the war Sams reported that a German flying a captured Nieuport had shot him down. Leffers did indeed have a captured Nieuport 16 with a synchronised 'Spandau' gun, and must have been flying it on this day. His 'Hohenzollern' was officially awarded on the 4th.

September saw an ever-increasing intensity of aerial conflict over the Somme battlefield, with *Jasta 1* in the thick of it. On the 7th Lt von Keudell doubled his score when he downed a Nieuport between Miraumont and Pys – probably the N38 machine of Sgt Grosourdy de Saint Pierre, who was killed.

Born on 5 April 1892, Hans von Keudell began the war as a lieutenant with the *Ulan Regiment 'Kaiser Alexander II von Russland' (1 Brandenburg) Nr 3*. In June 1915 he reported to *FEA 2* for pilot training, returning to the front as a pilot with *Briefliauben-Abteilung-Ostende* on 13 December. Von Keudell provided yeoman service with the two-seater formation, and its successor unit *Kagohl 1*, before joining *KEK B* on 4 August 1916, along with Oblt Bethge.

Gustav Leffers re-entered the victory lists in *Jasta 1* with a Martinsyde on 31 August 1916. On 3 September he downed his seventh adversary, apparently while flying this captured Nieuport 16. The latter was painted in a light colour, and equipped with a synchronised 'Spandau' LMG 08 machine gun

In the vanguard of the victorious fighting in September was the veteran *Fokkerflieger* Kurt Wintgens, who generally flew with his friend Höhndorf. On the 14th Wintgens attained his second 'double' of the war. He was credited with a Nieuport at 1100 hrs and an unidentified pusher type seven hours later. Wintgens continued his rampage the next day when he riddled the No 21 Sqn BE 12 single-seater of 2Lt C



Elphinston. The RFC pilot survived as a PoW and reported that he was attacked by a Fokker, and presumably he meant an Eindecker. Wintgens wounded Elphinston and shot away his rudder control wires but the latter managed a crash-landing at La Orel, near Marancourt.

On 17 September *Jasta 1* enjoyed another red-letter day, with Wintgens, Zander and Höhndorf all claiming victims. The *Staffel* transferred to Hermies, near Cambrai, on 23 September.

As noted, Kurt Wintgens was still flying a Fokker E IV for at least some of his September victories. His friend Buddecke wrote that when the ace returned from a victorious flight, 'We always heard Wintgens signalling with his rotary engine – "brr, brr, brr" – the sign that another one was down'. For whatever reason, Wintgens may actually have preferred the monoplane to the newer Halberstadt biplanes due to the Fokker E IV's superior firepower.

Whatever the case, on 24 September Wintgens showed he was still in top form by racking up his final double to bring his total to 18 (19 in some sources), ranking him second to Boelcke as the top German ace of the day. First Wintgens flamed a BE 12 from No 19 Sqn, sending it blazing down to crash at Flesquières. His second (and final) victim was apparently Martinsyde G 100 7498 of No 27 Sqn, which was captured after having departed its base on an offensive patrol at 1540 hrs British time. The Martinsyde was displayed in Germany as a trophy, and its pilot, 2Lt E H Wingfield, later reported upon his return from prison camp that he had been shot down at Ribécourt by Lt Wintgens in a Fokker.

On 25 September Wintgens was on the hunt again, in tandem with his good friend Walter Höhndorf. Above Villers-Carbonnel at around 1100 hrs, they were surprised by French fighters diving out of the sun. When he returned, a distraught Höhndorf reported that Wintgens' aircraft broke up, apparently after being hit by 'explosive' bullets. A letter from Hans-Joachim Buddecke stated;

'Today we must bury our good man Wintgens. He was surprised while flying a Fokker E IV (160 hp). One of the main elevator spars was shot through and broke like Höhndorf's and Berthold's, and he crashed. Wintgens himself did not show any bullet wounds.'

Josef Jacobs' diary entry for 26 September stated;

'I heard that Lt Wintgens, the victor over 20 enemy aircraft (sic), had been shot down by a formation of Nieuports and killed. We knew

The mixed equipment of *Jagdstaffel 1* just may be exemplified by this evocative photo of Kurt Wintgens scrambling into his Fokker E IV before take-off, for a Halberstadt fighter appears in the background. Wintgens was the sharp edge of *Jasta 1* in September 1916, frequently flying and scoring with his friend Höhndorf. The evidence indicates he achieved most of his *Jasta 1* victories in a Fokker E IV, and died in the type on 25 September



Hans von Keudell flew this Halberstadt D III in *Jasta 1*, the aircraft being marked with his 'K' initial in black. Note the translucent appearance of the upper wing and the opacity of the white cross fields. This may indicate that the aircraft was covered in clear-doped linen fabric of an off-white or pale beige appearance (*L Bronnenkant*)

Gustav Leffers paid a visit to the *Jastaschule* at Valenciennes after the award of his *Pour le Mérite* on 9 November. Here, he poses with two unidentified comrades and a Halberstadt D II. Leffers succumbed to the fate that befell most of the early 'Blue Max' winners, falling in combat on 27 December 1916. He was apparently flying his Nieuport 16 at the time of his demise (*T Weber*)



that only with great difficulty it was possible to recover Wintgens' body from the frontlines during the night of 25/26 September.'

One story claims that Wintgens was going to the aid of a German C-type of FFA 23 that was under attack by French fighters – the pilot in the two-seater was future *Pour le Mérite* ace Josef Veltjens. What seems certain is that Wintgens fell to the fire of Alfred Heurtaux, who was probably flying one of the new SPAD VII fighters from *Escadrille* N3. It is possible the type was so new that German accounts misidentified the French machines as Nieuports. Wintgens' Fokker fell as the eighth of 21 victories that Heurtaux would achieve.

Two days later a solemn procession wound its way through the streets of St Quentin. Wintgens' coffin was accompanied by fellow aces von Althaus, Buddecke and Frankl, with Höhndorf in the lead carrying the dead ace's *Ordenkissen*. Wintgens was buried in the military cemetery on the outskirts of town, which also held Otto Parschau's body. Perhaps it was fitting that Wintgens died in a Fokker E IV, for he had arguably scored the very first Fokker victory.

The pace of scoring stagnated a bit in October, with a mere four victories chalked up by the *Jasta*. Hptm Zander got his fourth opponent on the 10th, and seven days later Leffers finally achieved his magic number eight by despatching an FE 2b from No 11 Sqn. Von Keudell provided evidence of his growing skill with two victories towards the end of the month.

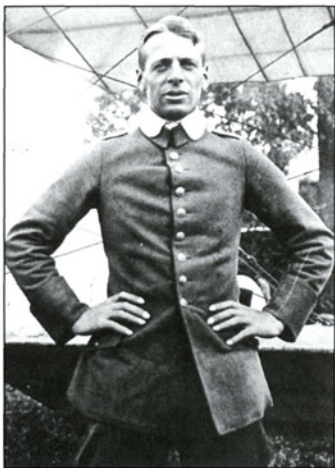
The veteran Leffers was no doubt eagerly expecting the *Pour le Mérite* since he had reached the usual benchmark of eight victories. His award was three long weeks in coming, however, as the authorities were re-evaluating the standards for a *Jagdflieger* to earn the order. The rapidly increasing scores of a number of pilots raised the concern that eight victories was now too low a number, and the standard would eventually be raised to 16 (and later 20). Such an old hand as Leffers was still considered worthy, however, and there was great rejoicing at the *Staffel* on 9 November when his 'Blue Max' was announced.

There was even further reason for a festive mood that day, as Leffers notched up his ninth victory, and the estimable von Keudell added two more. The next day Zander was posted out to command the new *Jastaschule* (a school to train fighter pilots) forming at Valenciennes. Oblt Hans Kummert would eventually take his place.



Rara avis. This photograph shows a Fokker biplane flown by Hans von Keudell at *Jasta 1* and marked with his 'K' monogram on the fuselage. *Jasta 1* was certainly equipped with the Fokker D I, which this machine resembles. However, the balanced ailerons and other features indicate this may have been a rare example of a prototype Fokker D IV (powered by a 160 hp Mercedes D III), supplied to *Jasta 1* for operational trials. Only the prototypes had the cabane strut arrangement seen here
(T Genth/T Phillips)

The master and his machine – Hptm Oswald Boelcke with his Fokker D III 352/16 at the *Jasta 2* airfield at Bertincourt. Boelcke appears very informal here, with no decorations at all. He may have achieved seven victories in this D III



Six more victories were attained during the rest of November, with von Keudell raising his score to ten. On 4 December Karl Ernthaller's Fokker D I 175/16 crashed due to wing failure during a test flight. Together with a similar fatal crash in *Jasta 3* three months before, this led to a *Kogenluft* order withdrawing the D I from combat and restricting the use of all Fokker types.

Gustav Leffers, one of the last of the great *Eindeckerflieger*, continued to use his Nieuport 16 throughout December, but without success. On the 27th, flying with Wilhelm Cymera, he attacked FE 2b 7666 of No 11 Sqn, crewed by Capt J B Quested and 2Lt H J H Dicksee. The RFC crew shot Leffers down over Cherisy, and remarked in their combat report that the enemy pilot was flying a Nieuport in German markings. Cymera shot up the 'Fee', but the crew made a safe forced landing. Leffers' comrade Hans von Keudell (who would himself die on 15 February 1917) offered the final word in a letter;

'I was thinking of you on New Year's Eve. However I had to remain here for the midday 31st services for our Ltn Leffers, who fell in battle on the 27th. Only my most recent accident affected my nerves more. Leffers was our sharpshooter, and our man of caution. Bad luck appears to hang around those who receive this order (the *Pour le Mérite*), since we have already borne six of them to their graves.'

Jagdstaffel 2

Sharing the 1. *Armee* front with *Jasta 1* was *Jasta 2*, led by the master, Boelcke. When he arrived at Bertincourt in late August, Boelcke found a sturdy collection of wooden hangars and other buildings in the southeast corner of the Velu woods, left behind by FFA 32. He wrote;

'I am now hard at work, and my first job is to get hold of everything I want. There are still many things lacking, above all, the most important thing – the machines.'

In contrast to Zander at *Jasta 1*, Boelcke had to form his unit almost from scratch. The *Staffel* war diary recorded on 27 August that the personnel included three officers, 64 NCOs and enlisted men, but no aeroplanes as yet. By 1 September three aircraft had arrived – two Fokker D-types and Albatros D I 385/16, brought from *Jasta 1* by Reimann, as noted earlier in this chapter. The Fokkers included the brand new D III 352/16, which Boelcke fetched from AFP 1 on 1 September, and probably a D I.

On 8 September a total of eight pilots were on the roster, including a young Manfred von Richthofen and 37-year-old Erwin Böhme. The latter pilot seems to have brought a Halberstadt with him from AFP 1, for on the 11th he wrote that 'I have pushed to be allowed to temporarily use a cast-off Halberstadt, as Boelcke still has his old Fokker'. It would seem the unit could then muster just four aircraft.

By that time Boelcke had already returned to combat flying, showing he had lost none of his skill. On 2 September he achieved his 20th victory – a DH 2 that he referred to as a ‘Vickers’. Boelcke was flying Fokker D III 352/16, and wrote two days later;

‘Several days ago Fokker sent two machines for me, and I made my first flight in one of them the day before yesterday. There was a fair amount of aerial activity at the front. The fellows had grown very impudent. Somewhat later in the day I saw shell-bursts west of Bapaume. There I found a BE, followed by three Vickers single-seaters – i.e. an artillery aeroplane with its escort.

‘I went for the BE, but the other three interrupted me in the middle of my work, and so I beat a hasty retreat. One of those fellows thought he could catch me and gave chase. When I had lured him somewhat away from the others, I gave battle and soon got to grips with him. I did not let him go again – he did not get another shot in. When he went down, his machine was wobbling badly, but that, as he told me afterwards, was not his fault, because I had shot his elevator to pieces. The BE landed near Thièpvall – it was burning when the pilot jumped out, and he beat his arms and legs about because he was on fire too.

‘Yesterday, I fetched the Englishman I had forced to land – a certain Capt Wilson – from the prisoners’ clearing depot, took him to coffee in the mess and showed him our aerodrome, whereby I had a very interesting conversation with him.’

Capt Robert E Wilson of No 32 Sqn was flying DH 2 7895 when he made his narrow escape from death. He later wrote;

‘It is some consolation to me that I was brought down by Capt Boelcke, the greatest German airman, and that my life was preserved in a fashion that is almost miraculous. The next day, Boelcke invited me to his aerodrome and entertained me in his mess. We were also photographed together. I got a very fine impression of him both as a pilot and as a man, and this fight will remain the greatest memory of my life, even though it turned out badly for me.’

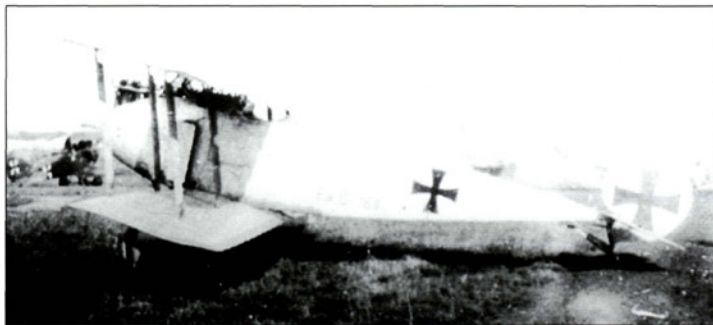
Boelcke was back in action with a vengeance, and from 8 to 15 September he claimed six more victories – all of them most likely while flying Fokker D III 352/16. He was almost a one-man *Jagdstaffel*, flying in the morning so that he could train his pilots during the rest of day. Whenever he returned from one of these flights, his eager ‘pups’ would gather around him and ask, ‘Well, got another, Hauptmann?’ to which Boelcke would reply, ‘Have I got a black chin? Well, that’s all right then’. If his chin was stained from the smoke of his guns, he had scored again.

He returned with a black chin on the 8th, having flamed an FE 2b from No 22 Sqn. Boelcke attacked ‘obliquely from behind’, since the engine protected the crew, and reported, ‘He tried in vain to wriggle out of the situation. Soon his machine took fire. My attack had brought me so near to him that his explosion splashed my machine with the oil that ran out’.

A group flight was made on 14 September, when Boelcke took off in the company of Böhme and Richthofen at about 0900 hrs. The threesome intercepted a flight of Sopwith 1½ Strutters from No 70 Sqn on their way home from a reconnaissance over Bapaume. Boelcke



This view shows off the 160 hp twin-row Oberursel motor of Boelcke's D III 352/16 on the Jasta 2 aerodrome. After Boelcke's death, this aircraft was presented to the Prussian military museum in Berlin for preservation. It was returned to the Fokker factory to be refurbished, and its finish was considerably altered for its museum exhibition. The DIII was destroyed in World War 2



The original album caption for this shot was 'Bölke's (sic) Fokker'. It is believed D I 168/16 was also used by Boelcke at *Jasta 2*. It is doubtful that any victories were attained in it, and certainly not at the time of this photo – no propeller is fitted

A virtual galaxy of stars was on the roster of the early *Jasta 4*, as proven by this photograph taken shortly after 10 October 1916. No less than five present and one future winner of the *Pour le Mérite* posed for the photographer. They are, from left to right, Ltn d R Alfred Lenz (later the six-victory CO of *Jasta 22*), Ltn d Rs Karl Stehle and Walter Höhdorf, Vfw Hermann Margot, Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke (in his Turkish Hauptmann uniform), Ltn d R Kralewski, Hptm Rudolf Berthold, Ltn Otto Bernert, Oblt Ernst Freiherr von Althaus and Ltn d Rs Hans Malchow and Wilhelm Frankl. Berthold received his 'Blue Max' on 10 October, but left shortly afterwards. Fritz Otto Bernert would earn his own *Pour le Mérite* on 23 April 1917



fastened on to A897, flown by 2Lt J H Gale and Sapper J M Strathy, and riddled it until it went down in a dive minus its top wing.

There was great excitement in the *Staffel* on Saturday, 16 September when six of the powerful new Albatros fighters were ferried in from *AFP 1*. These were apparently five D Is and one D II (386/16) for Boelcke. That

very same evening Ltn Otto Höhne added his name to the *Staffel* 'game book' by using one of the new fighters to down a British FE 2b. The Albatros era had begun at *Jasta 2*, ushering in a new phase of aerial conflict over the Somme.

Jagdstaffel 4

KEK Süd (also known as *KEK Vaux*) would form the nucleus for *Jasta 4*. Under the command of Oblt Rudolf Berthold, the new unit took on additional personnel from *AFP 2* and various *Feldflieger Abteilungen* in the 2. *Armee*. Berthold's determination to come to grips with the enemy remained firm, and he scored his sixth victory on 24 August while flying a Halberstadt fighter. This was Berthold's first victory since his crash of 25 April, and was the last for the old *KEK Süd* formation. Due to this success, Berthold received the Knight's Cross with Swords of the Prussian Royal Hohenzollern House Order three days later.

The metamorphosis to *Jagdstaffel 4* was completed by 25 August, and the unit's primary equipment seems to have been Halberstadt fighters. The unit was reportedly formed at Roupy, but by 9 September it had moved to Vaux airfield. On 28 August Berthold handed the reins of command over to Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke (recently returned from the Turkish front), but Berthold would continue to fly with the *Jasta*. Buddecke wrote;

'Berthold had already done all of the preparations for me, and had collected the best pilots. We erected our tents again in Vaux to house over a dozen machines.'

Jasta 4 did indeed initiate its operations with a stellar group of some of the best pilots available. Two 'Blue Max' holders were already with the *Staffel* – Buddecke and Wilhelm Frankl (who had received the award on 12 August). Walter Höhdorf transferred from *Jasta 1* on 1 September and Ernst von Althaus joined the *Jasta* on 26 September.

On that same day Berthold scored his eighth victory (although some sources cite a 'forced to land' on 22 September as his eighth), and was thus in line for his own 'Blue Max'. Yet another future *Pour le Mérite* winner was in the ranks, the promising Ltn Fritz Otto Bernert.

This remarkable airman was born in Ratibor, Upper Silesia, on 6 March 1893. He had been commissioned in the *Infanterie-Regiment Nr 173* in August 1912.

This unit was in the thick of fighting once the war began, and Bernert received his first wound in November 1914. By December he had sustained his fourth wound – a bayonet thrust to the left arm which severed the main nerve. With his arm rendered virtually useless, Bernert was deemed unfit for further infantry service.

This ardent patriot soon managed a transfer to the *Fliegertruppe*, however, and flew as an observer in *FFA 27* and then *FFA 71*. Bernert then commenced flying training as a pilot and, somehow, managed to succeed as a flier with only one good arm. He had been posted to *KEK Vaux* in March 1916, where he was credited with a Nieuport on 17 April as his first confirmed success.

With such a stellar cast of players, it was not long before *Jasta 4* began earning its keep. On 6 September Buddecke and Berthold led a *Staffel* attack on a flight of Caudrons, but it was Bernert who would achieve the honour of scoring the first victory for *Jagdstaffel 4* – he sent a Caudron G 4 down at Dompierre, east of Péronne. Buddecke also claimed an aircraft on this day, but this may not have been confirmed. On the 7th Wilhelm Frankl was credited with a Nieuport northeast of Combles for the unit's second victory. He duly claimed a Caudron the



The Halberstadt D II being warmed up at right is the machine of Walter Höhndorf, who is just wrapping his scarf in preparation for flight. In the foreground on the left is Hans-Joachim Buddecke, and von Althaus is in the lighter coat. The Halberstadt has been set up in flying position, and a stepladder stands ready for Höhndorf

Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus flew this Halberstadt D III, marked with his 'A' emblem, from the *Jasta 4* airfield at Vaux circa September 1916. The D III was powered by the 120 hp Argus As II engine, and was fitted with a raised exhaust stack



very next day, but it was not allowed. Bernert added a Nieuport on the 11th for his own third victory, and *Jasta 4* was well on its way.

On 15 September Frankl sent Nieuport 16 A136 of No 60 Sqn down in flames at Péronne, killing Capt A S M Summers. The next day Buddecke claimed a 'Vickers' (i.e., a 'Vickers' or British pusher) at 1855 hrs near Chaulnes for what the *Jasta* War Diary states was his eighth official victory. Two more British aircraft were credited to the *Jasta* on 17 September, Berthold receiving confirmation for an 'Avro', which was more likely a Martinsyde G 100, and Frankl downing an FE 2b of No 11 Sqn at 1135 hrs at Equancourt. The latter was one of four machines lost by No 11 Sqn on this day, the other three falling to Albatros pilots from *Jasta 2* – including the first victory for Manfred von Richthofen.

The Halberstadt pilots from *Jasta 4* joined the Albatros airmen from *Jasta 2* in another action on the 22nd, and competing claims were filed by the eager *Jagdflieger*. The BE 12 single-seaters of No 19 Sqn flew two offensive patrols to bomb Velu airfield in the 1. *Armee* sector, and paid dearly. The BE 12 was a misguided effort to upgrade the basic BE 2c airframe with the RAF 4a engine of 140 hp, the single-seater being armed with a synchronised Vickers gun. The aircraft was intended to operate as both a bomber and a fighter.

The No 19 Sqn machines were apparently intercepted by elements of *Jagdstaffeln 2* and 4 in the vicinity of Le Transloy, and three of the RFC pilots were killed. Berthold probably accounted for BE 12 6591, piloted by 2Lt R H Edwards, but received credit only for an aircraft 'forced to land' (usually not counted as a 'victory' in German records). Frankl, Buddecke and Vfw Ernst Clausnitzer staked their own claims, but these were disallowed in favour of Hans Reimann, Leopold Reimann and Otto Höhne of *Jasta 2*. Buddecke did not finish the day

The dashing playboy Ernst *Freiherr* von Althaus strikes a pose with his Halberstadt D III and his mechanics (from left to right) Weiser, *Ordonnanz* Neumann and Reihe. According to Hptm Erich Serno, von Althaus had a reputation for 'gambling, love of women and even worse habits'. His gambling problems would later get him sacked from command of *Jasta 10* and land him in serious trouble, but he did survive the war (T Weber)



empty-handed, however, for he received confirmation for another aircraft which gave him his ninth victory. The day's successes were balanced by *Jasta 4*'s first casualty – Lt n d R Eberhard Fügner was severely wounded and sent to hospital.

The *Staffel* scoring streak continued unabated on 23 September, with the *Staffelführer* Buddecke destroying another of the hapless BE 12 machines at 0955 hrs. Lt J M Kenny of No 21 Sqn was brought down behind German lines at Sailly in BE 12 6167 and soon died of his wounds. Nearly ten hours later, Alfred Behling achieved his first 'kill' with a BE 2e of No 34 Sqn destroyed. The next day Berthold claimed a Nieuport that went unconfirmed, but he would not be denied in his quest for the 'Blue Max'.

On the 26th he achieved confirmation for a 'Sopwith two-seater', which brought his total to eight (nine in some sources), and his *Pour le Mérite* followed on 10 October. The reliable Wilhelm Frankl added his own claim on the 26th – a Caudron – to bring the *Staffel* total to 12 opponents credited in three weeks.

Four more victories were attained in October. On the 10th Frankl achieved a victory over what was probably a rare Nieuport 14 two-seater, at 1330 hrs near Villers Carbonnel. *Escadrille* N62 lost the crew of Sgt Roger Thuau and Lt Jean Billon du Plan, both missing in action. The 10th also brought news for Berthold. Buddecke wrote;

'Then came a wonderful day, as well as a sad one, for the *Staffel*. We received a telegram stating that His Majesty had awarded the *Pour le Mérite* to Berthold, and had given him command of a *Jagdstaffel* in the Alsace. The next day, two of us circled over the railway station of St Quentin, where a train took our brave companion from us on his way to new deeds.'

Berthold officially took command of *Jasta 14* on 16 October. On the 21st Bernert attained his significant fourth success at the expense of



Wilhelm Frankl had received his *Pour le Mérite* shortly before *Jasta 4* was formed, and he was credited with a Nieuport on 7 September for the second *Staffel* victory. Josef Jacobs saw Frankl demonstrate a Halberstadt, and said that 'Frankl flew the aircraft in the wildest banks and loops that I have ever seen. In my opinion Frankl is one of the most skilled pilots we have produced'. Frankl brought his own score to 19 or 20 before his death on 8 April 1917. Because he was Jewish, his name does not appear in German aviation literature of the Nazi period



Jasta 4 *Staffelführer* Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke strikes a pensive pose with his Halberstadt D V at Vaux. This aircraft was marked with two pale fuselage bands of unconfirmed colour (L Bronnenkant)



Ltn Otto Bernert poses with a unique Halberstadt D III most likely when he flew with *Jasta 4*. This aircraft boasted two LMG 08 machine guns, both mounted on the starboard side and fed by a complicated arrangement of ammunition belt chutes. This modification was very likely carried out at the *Jasta* level by some very skilled mechanics

One of the most successful of the early *Jasta 5* pilots was Hans Karl Müller, who had claimed his second victory as an Eindecker pilot in *KEK* Avillers. The name *Frechdachs* applied to the cowling roughly translates as 'cheeky badger', or perhaps a shortened form of 'cheeky dachshund'. At any rate, the connotation is one of cockiness or daring



a Caudron crew from *Escadrille* C28. The next day, Frankl continued his victory run with a Sopwith 1½ Strutter over Driencourt at 1145 hrs (No 45 Sqn lost three 'Strutters', and another shot up, with most of these falling to Boelcke and his *Jasta 2*).

Jasta 4 posted only three victories in November, but they all came on one day – and were claimed by one pilot! On the 9th, a formation of BE 2c bombers from Nos 12 and 13 Sqns, escorted by DH 2s from No 29 Sqn and other fighters from Nos 11 and 60 Sqns, made a large raid on Vraucourt. They were effectively attacked by fighters from *Jagdstaffeln* 1, 2 and 4, the Germans splitting up the bombing formation into more vulnerable groups – carnage ensued. Otto Bernert started out an incredible day by subtracting a DH 2 from the strength of No 29 Sqn at 1030 hrs at Le Sars. He later wrote;

'In August 1916 I was transferred to a *Jagdstaffel*, and on 9 November that same year, in the course of a long and continuous engagement, I had the luck to shoot down three enemy aircraft from one squadron (sic), and, in so doing, vanquished my fifth, sixth and seventh opponents.'

When, exactly, *Jasta 4* replaced its Halberstadt fighters with Albatros D-types is uncertain, but this probably started before the end of 1916. No more victories were claimed before January (two unconfirmed on the 23rd), by which time Albatros fighters were likely on hand.

Jagdstaffel 5

KEK Avillers (or *KEK Ost*) had been formed as one of Hptm Haehnelt's 5. *Armee* units for the Verdun operation in early 1916. This *Kommando* was still largely equipped with Fokker monoplanes when it formed the nucleus of *Jasta 5* on 21 August 1916. Based at an airfield northeast of Béchamps, in the Verdun sector, the *Staffel* was commanded by Oblt Hans Berr, a veteran *Eindeckerflieger* with two victories scored in March 1916.

One of the promising pilots on his roster was Offz Stv Hans Karl Müller, who also had two confirmed victims, the second being a Nieuport he had downed as a member of *KEK* Avillers on 3 August. On the 26th Müller opened the unit's tally by claiming what he called a Voisin (generally credited as the first victory for *Jasta 5*). Müller would achieve even greater acclaim by flaming a captive balloon on 31 August.

By that time *Jasta 5* had transferred northwest to Bellevue Ferme, near Senon. However, the declining tempo of aerial combat on the Verdun front, and the increasing activity on the Somme, led to a transfer to the 1. *Armee* sector, where the *Staffel* eventually settled in at Gonnellieu.

It would appear that *Jasta 5* had been primarily re-equipped with Halberstadt fighters by early October. Indeed, Berr was probably flying one when he initiated a scoring spree with a double (a Caudron and a BE 12) on 7 October, followed by four more before the end of the month – including another double on the 26th, which took his tally to eight. Hans Müller apparently reached 'acedom' shortly before his *Staffelführer* by downing a British FE 2b on the 16th.

By the end of October *Jasta 5* was well on its way to its future designation as the *Kanonenstaffel* (the aces' squadron), with an impressive 15 opponents chalked up, and five more to follow in November. With his score standing at ten, Hans Berr received his *Pour le Mérite* on 4 December, the last pilot to earn the award under the 'old' standards (the next 'Blue Max' would go to von Richthofen, but not before he reached a total of 16). Ironically, Hans Müller had attained at least 11 victories by Boxing Day of 1916, but because he was not an officer he was prohibited from receiving the 'Blue Max'.

In early 1917 *Jasta 5* became an *Albatros Staffel*.

Josef Jacobs and *Jagdstaffel 12*

At the end of July 1916, Josef Jacobs of *FFA 11* and *Fokkerstaffel West* had been assigned to fly protection for the General Headquarters at Charleville for one month. This rear-area assignment disgusted him immensely, but on 1 September he was back at the front with *FFA 11*, flying Fokker E III 339/16. On 20 September his diary recorded;

'Yesterday evening I received news that my Fokker biplane was ready. I climbed into the crate and flew her for the first time. She climbed strongly and soon faded from view into the clouds. I then said farewell to the people and flew the machine to Chauny. We drank an evening toast to the occasion. With God's help we hope to achieve success in this aircraft.'

Jacobs was photographed with Fokker D II 541/16, and this is probably the biplane he was referring to. He flew a patrol with the new aircraft on 24 September;

'At the start my machine climbed perfectly until it reached 3000 metres, when my magneto oiled up so the engine could only produce 1000 rpm. It took a lot of coaxing to reach 4900 metres. An evening test flight during which I fired 100 rounds at a small target has proven the Fokker D appears to be more stable than the Fokker monoplane. In a turn, and without extra pressure on the controls, it is also faster.'

On 28 September, Jacobs' diary recorded an event of tragic significance;

'We heard this evening that Lt n Mulzer was killed when he crashed during a visit to the *Flugpark* at Valenciennes. He had downed 12 to 14 enemy aircraft (ten officially), and was the fourth great "ace" to die. Mulzer was at the *Flugpark* to test a new aircraft which had just arrived there. He was killed after he slipped into a hard bank and crashed.'

Max Ritter von Mulzer had been testing Albatros D I 426/16 when he crashed at *AFP 6* on 26 September. This happened only one day after Kurt Wintgens died, and there is little wonder there was a growing superstition that the



Oblt Hans Berr was the capable and innovative commander of *Jasta 5*. This photo was taken after his 'Blue Max' was awarded on 4 December 1916. Like Boelcke, Berr was a great tactician and teacher. Also like Boelcke, he would die as a result of a mid-air collision with one of his own pilots

Jasta 5 Halberstadts are seen in this photo taken on Gonnellieu airfield in late 1916 or early 1917. The Halberstadt in the background, marked with a white '1', was Hans Berr's machine. Facing the camera in the centre of the group is Vzflgmr Max Winkelmann and Vfw Büssing



'Blue Max' was almost a death sentence for a *Jagdflieger*. Shortly before he took off in the D I, von Mulzer is alleged to have said, 'Immelmann is dead. Parschau is dead, Wintgens is dead. Now I am next in line'.

On 29 September, Jacobs wrote; 'My Fokker is now ready after an engine overhaul. Today it will be painted dark blue, otherwise she would shine and be too visible in the sky.'

However, later that day Jacobs fell ill with a case of dysentery which would sideline him for several weeks. From his sickbed on 6 October, he recorded that, '*Jagdstaffel* 12 has been established and Ltn Birk, Uffz Mittelmeyer and myself have been posted to it'. Five days later, he wrote that his Fokker had been painted dark blue.

Fokkerstaffel West was transformed into the new *Jasta* 12 by increasing its establishment of personnel and aeroplanes. The change in title was used from 6 October, and the unit was based near Laon in the 7. *Armee*. With Jacobs' illness putting him out of action, on 5 October the *Jasta* war diary recorded that Fokker D II 541/16 was assigned to Oblt Hoenemanns, and that Jacobs himself (although still in the hospital) was assigned Fokker D I 171/16. On the 22nd, Jacobs wrote, 'Oblt Hoenemanns came this afternoon to collect my Fokker. Take-off was about 1800 hrs, and he climbed as if on a staircase and faded from sight as he flew toward Laon'. This was probably D II 541/16, which was part of the motley collection of Fokker E III, E IV, D I and D II machines initially on the strength of *Jasta* 12.

The primary aircraft flown by *Jasta* 12 in November seems to have been the Fokker D I, but it brought the unit little good fortune. On the 15th, pilot Hans Malz was slightly injured in a crash of D I 1905/16, while Otto Augst was wounded in D I 216/16. On the 22nd Gefr Robert Michaelis died in D I 218/16. The unit did not obtain its first victory until Ltn d L Splitgerber downed an FE 2b on 4 December, but Vfw Wilhelm Hennebeil was killed in D I 169/16 that same day.

Meanwhile, Oblt Hoenemanns had been given command of *Jasta* 22, and he requested that Jacobs be transferred to his new unit. However, before he could take up the assignment, Jacobs was transferred to the *Jastaschule* at Valenciennes as an instructor. There, he had the opportunity to fly a new fighter on 18 December;

'I flew a Halberstadt for the first time in the afternoon. The 7. *Armee* has not as yet received this type of aircraft. The machine is extraordinarily easy to fly, very fast and stable, and possessed no vices.'

On 18 January 1917, Jacobs left the *Jastaschule* to report for combat duty with *Jasta* 22, where he would fly Halberstadt D II 595/16 (built by Aviatik). He used this nimble machine to score his second victory, which is recorded as occurring on either 23 or 24 January.



Ltn d R Josef Jacobs is seen on the left with his Fokker D II, most likely 541/16 – exhaust fumes and oil stains have already discoloured the fuselage and removed the last digit in the military serial number. It is thought that this is the Fokker biplane he later had painted dark blue so that it would not 'shine' and be too conspicuous in the air (HAC/UTD)

Jagdstaffeln 15 and 16

KEK Habsheim in the *Armee-Abteilung* 'B' (later *Armee Abteilung Gaede*) sector had been in existence since late December 1915 – this was Ernst Udet's unit on the Vosges front. The official formation of *Jasta* 15 from *KEK* Habsheim was recorded on 28 September 1916, but the actual accumulation of personnel and material for a permanent *Staffel* began in October. The first commander was Oblt Kropp. The early aircraft operated by the unit were apparently Fokker D II and D III types, based at Habsheim airfield along with *FFA* 48.

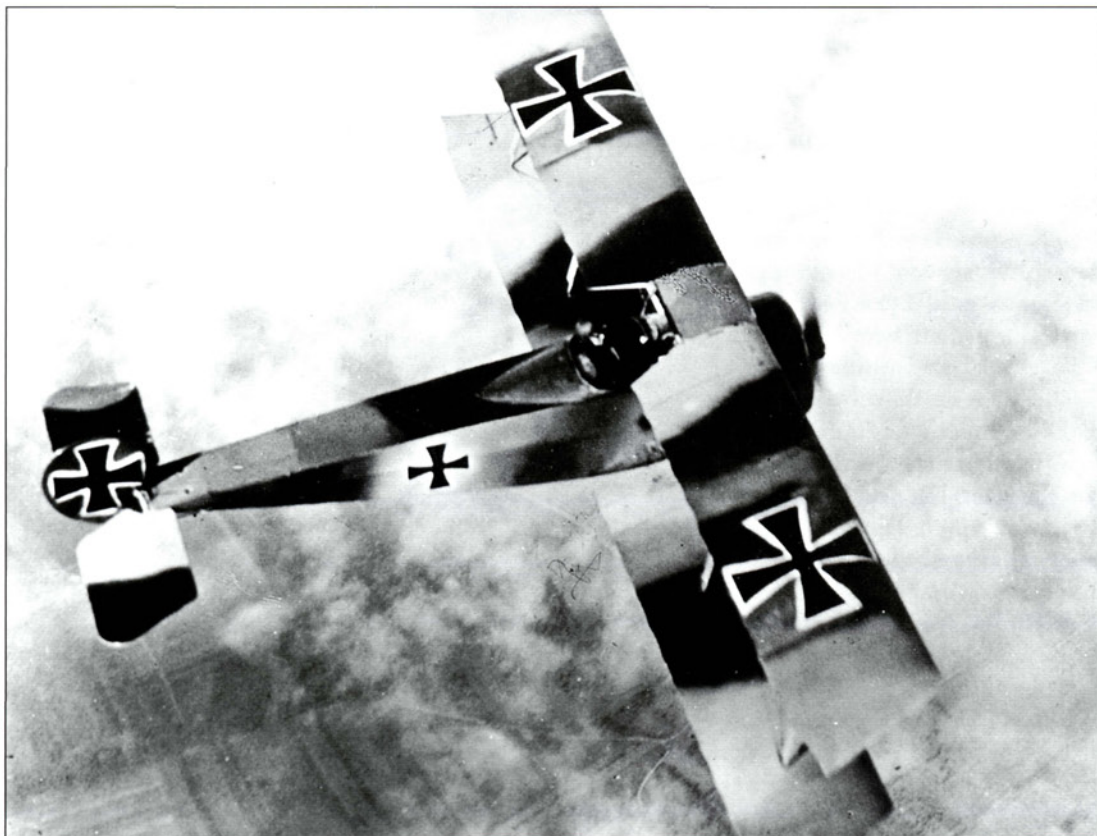
Another formation of similar standing in *Armee-Abteilung* 'B' was *KEK* Ensisheim, which was the fighter detachment of *FFA* 9b, based at Colmar-Nord aerodrome. This formation would not officially change its title to *Jasta* 16 until 1 November. Again, a mixed bag of aircraft seem to have been on hand, including Fokker E and D machines. Also based at Colmar were six Ago C I pusher twin-engine two-seaters of *FFA* 9b.

Both of these units formed part of the area-wide defence against increasing French bombing raids into the industrialised Saar Valley. On 12 October a massive Anglo-French raid was made against the Mauser factory at Oberndorf-am-Neckar. Capitaine Maurice Happe's *Groupe de Bombardment* 4 would spearhead the mission, starting out with *Escadrilles* F29, F123 and BM120 flying Farmans and Breguet-Michelin BM IV and V machines. These were reinforced by 26 RNAS aircraft from No 3 Wing, including Sopwith 1½ Strutter two-seater escorts and Sopwith single-seat and Breguet-Michelin V bombers. Four Nieuport fighters from *Escadrille* N124 – the famous unit of American volunteers – would also provide escort for the French Breguets (see *Osprey Aviation Elite Units 17 - SPA 124 Lafayette Escadrille* for further details).

At just after 1500 hrs, the commander of *FFA* 9b, Hptm Stabl, received a telephone message alerting him that five hostile aircraft were flying eastward from Gebweiler. Immediately the order '*Maschinen heraus!*' galvanised the unit's personnel into action. The entire

On 20 December 1916, Josef Jacobs was an instructor at the *Jastaschule* in Valenciennes. He had flown to Chauny to do a demonstration flight in this Halberstadt D V, but flew too close to a wind vane and damaged his undercarriage in the collision. Nonetheless, Jacobs consistently praised the easy handling qualities of the Halberstadt fighter, and said it was more manoeuvrable than the Albatros D II





Ltn d R Otto Kissenberth of *KEK* Ensisheim had quite a day on 12 October 1916, achieving his first three victories in defence against the famous Oberndorf raid. Kissenberth was flying Fokker D II 540/16, seen here cavorting over Colmar. This machine left the factory with white cross fields and green and reddish-brown camouflage applied to the upper surfaces of the wings and fuselage. At the front, additional camouflage was applied, and the white cross backgrounds were painted out to produce the uneven borders seen here

complement of *FFA* 9b aircraft – six Agos and three Fokker biplanes – would take off in response to the raid. Ltn Kiliani of the *Abteilung* wrote a lively account of the day's actions;

'The Gnôme motors of the Fokker Ds give out a melodious roar and cover their colourful envelopes in a big, opaque, but agreeable, flowing cloud of smoke. Now it is just two minutes after the first phone alarm, yet already the three single-seater Fokkers fly from the field. On their way are Ltn Kissenberth and Vfw Hanstein and Hilz.'

The four Farmans of *Escadrille* F29 formed the first of the formations, and they managed to drop their bombs before any of the German defenders could intercept them successfully. However, the three Farmans of F123 were not so lucky. Adjutant Henri Baron and Sgt André Guérineau flew the lead Farman. Kiliani wrote;

'Now they are over the big forest between Neuf Breisach and Colmar. They turn neither right nor left, and do not perceive that behind them are two white Fokkers coming nearer and nearer. In one, his lips clamped tight, his eyes already over the sights on the Farman's nacelle, sits Ltn Kissenberth. In the other sits Vfw Hilz. Nearer, ever nearer, come the "aides of Death" wrapped in their homemade scarves. A second long "tak-tak-tak", and, uncontrolled, the Farman crate plummets down, turning over once, twice, and rushes into the middle of the woods near Widensolen.'

Kissenberth next turned his attention to the Farman flown by Sous-Lt Georges and Sgt Jouan;

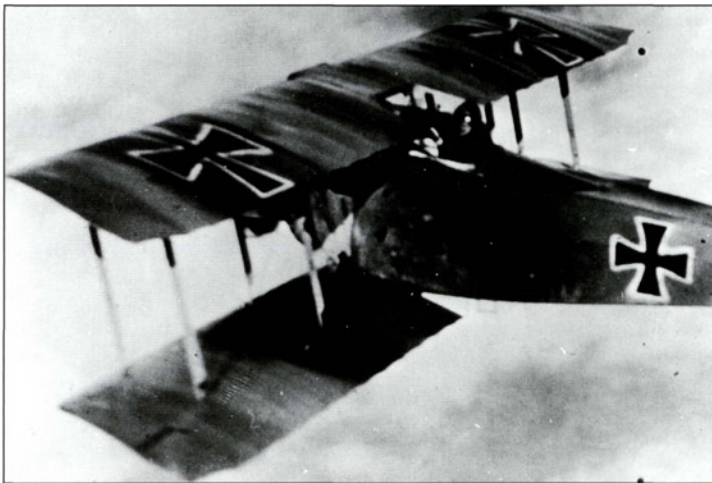
'Armand Georges and Ernest Jouan had not seen the end of their comrades. They saw only the flak bursts to the right and left, saw Neuf Breisach below, the Rhine, before them the Mooswald and beautiful Freiburg.

'They cross into Württemberg toward Oberndorf. The white-green Fokker of Ltn Kissenberth is close behind. There is a short "tak-tak-tak". In a tight spiral the Frenchmen go down, with the Fokker behind with its "tak-tak-tak". Near Ihringen, the Farman goes over on one wing near the Breisach-Freiburg railway. Kissenberth banks away – he has almost no fuel left and no more ammunition, and he lands at *Flugpark* Neuf Breisach (at 1531 hrs) to rearm and refuel, and telephones in his report.'

Meanwhile, several Fokker biplane pilots of *Jasta* 15 had also scrambled from Habsheim. They included Ltn d R Otto Pfälzer, Ltn d R Kurt Haber in Fokker D II 545/16 and Vfw Ernst Udet, possibly flying his Fokker D III 368/16, which had a tin-plate silhouette of an observer affixed to the turtledeck. This *stille Beobachter* (silent observer) was intended to make Allied opponents think that the Fokker was a two-seater, and it may have succeeded. The crew of one of F123's escorting Sopwiths reported an encounter with 'an altogether small two-seater biplane of a type absolutely new'.

The fighters of *Jasta* 15 then went after the formation of eight Breguets of BM120, just crossing the Vosges with their escort of Nieuports from N124. Udet attacked the Breguet of Cpl Barlet and Soldat Luneau, as he later wrote;

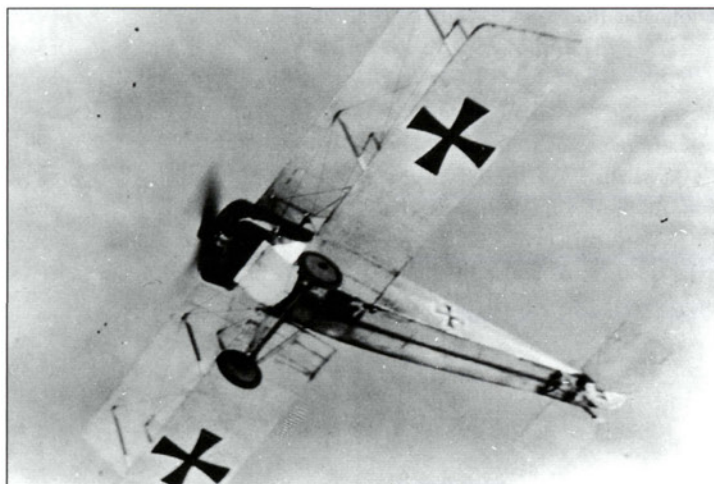
'Because it flew directly under me, it was easy work. I dropped down past the Nieuports, placed myself in a safe position behind the leading machine and, with 350 shots, forced it to land. It landed intact, and in



Another in a series of propaganda photographs that show Kissenberth cavorting in the clouds in his Fokker D II. The camouflage colours produce quite different impressions in the various photos due to the varying angles of sunlight. These shots perfectly illustrate the difficulty of judging colours from black and white photographs

Ernst Udet of *Jasta* 15 poses with his Fokker D III 368/16 (Wk-Nr 655) on Habsheim airfield. Udet applied his artistic skills to the production of a tin plate 'silent observer', mounted on the fuselage. He may have been flying this aircraft when he attained his second victory during the Oberndorf raid





The underside of Kissenberth's Fokker D II was most likely covered in very pale clear-doped fabric, which would have appeared 'white' when seen from below. The crosses were painted directly on the fabric. When seen from above, the aircraft probably produced a dark greenish impression. Thus, Ltn Kiliani of FFA 9b gave an off-handed description of Kissenberth's 'white-green' Fokker

Udet is also alleged to have flown this Fokker D III 1017/16, which was written off in this crash-landing in the winter of 1916-17. This aircraft came from a batch numbered D 1004-1023/16, ordered in July 1916 (HAC/UTD)

order to prevent the occupants from destroying it, I landed beside it. Because my tyres were punctured by shots, I turned over, but without serious consequences. It was a comical picture – the vanquished landed upright and the victor landed upside-down. Both Frenchmen clambered down and we shook hands all around. On the nacelle (of the Breguet) was the proud inscription "*Le voila le Foudroyan*" (Here comes the Destroyer).'

Udet had his second victory, and soon his *Staffel* comrade Otto

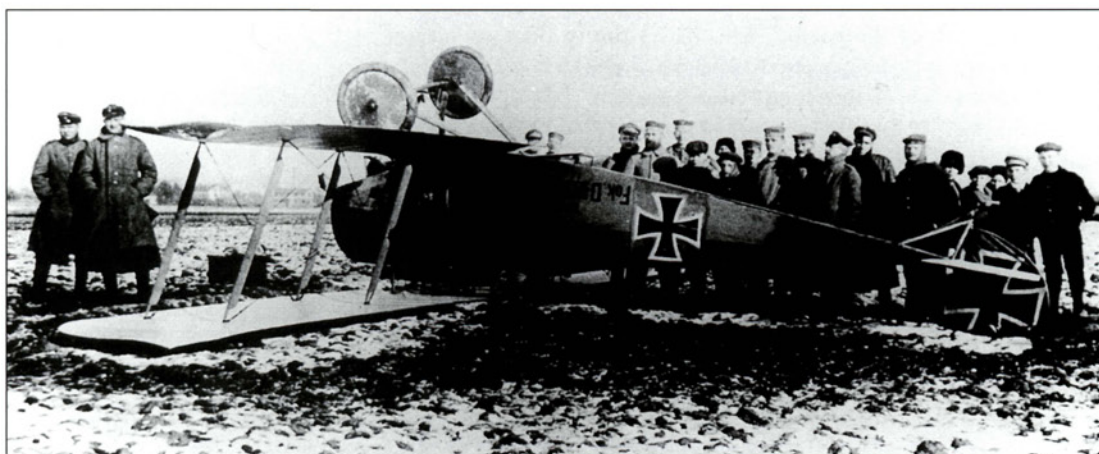
Pfälzer joined with the Ago crew of Kiliani and Ltn Hans Hartl in forcing another Breguet to land near Bremgarten. Kurt Haber received credit for bringing down the Breguet of MdL Mottay and Cpl Marchand, which landed intact near Steinbach for Haber's fifth victory.

Kissenberth's CO, Hptm Stabl, wrote;

'At 1531 hrs Ltn Kissenberth landed at AFP B to report, and took off again – without orders – immediately at the news that further enemy aircraft were on their way. There then followed an unsuccessful attack on a Voisin south of Freiburg and an unsuccessful battle with two Sopwiths southwest of this city. A shortage of fuel forced Ltn Kissenberth to land in Freiburg at 1610 hrs.'

Kissenberth had damaged the Sopwith of Flt Sub-Lt Raymond Collishaw, but it escaped to limp back to its field at Luxeuil. Kissenberth's friend Ludwig Hanstein succeeded in wounding Flt Sub-Lt C H S Butterworth, who landed Sopwith bomber 9660 at Freiburg in spite of his neck wound – this was the first of 16 victories for Hanstein.

The indomitable Kissenberth had taken off for the third time at 1628 hrs, entirely on his own initiative, and found a lone British



Breguet (crewed by Flt Sub-Lt Rockey and his bombardier Gunlayer Sturdee) under attack by the Ago of Ltms Pfeleiderer and Simson. Kiliani wrote;

'The Ago gets behind and fires a burst into the Englishmen's nacelle. Then a Fokker from above shoots – it is Kissenberth again – half-obliques under it and rattles another burst into the Englishmen's motor. The observer defends himself like a wild man. A shot splits Kissenberth's outboard strut and it flies away, yet the wing holds, and he comes back for a third time. Again a burst goes into the Breguet's cowlings – at the same time the English observer is hit from Simson's gun below.

'The Englishman tilts downward and lands near Oberenzen, 15 kilometres south of Colmar. Pfeleiderer and Simson follow him down and land alongside. Kissenberth did not risk a landing on the rough field with his damaged aircraft, and flew back to Colmar-Nord, but received the credit for the victory anyway.'

In all, the Allied force lost 15 aircraft and 21 crewmen to the fighters of *Jasta 15*, *KEK Ensisheim*, *FFA 9b* and to anti-aircraft fire. For scoring his first three victories this day, Kissenberth was awarded the Württemberg Friedrich Order Knight 2nd Class with swords, Baden's Knight 2nd Class with Swords of the Zähringer Lion Order and the Bavarian Military Merit Order 4th Class with Swords.

CONCLUSION

These are just a few examples of some of the successes attained by the early *Jagdstaffeln* with their Halberstadt and Fokker D-types. Inspired by Boelcke and his aggressive group of *Jasta 2* pilots, the *Jagdflieger* did their best to wrest back control of the air from the Allies. Generalleutnant Ernst von Hoeppner, who took over the German air arm as *Kommandierende General der Luftstreitkräfte* on 8 October 1916, would later write;

'If the enemy's superiority in the air that was so oppressive at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme was broken at its end, the merit is due in no slight measure to Boelcke and the *Jagdstaffel* he led.

'In their gallantry and teamwork, they were a model for all German *Jagdstaffeln*. Proof of their activity can be seen in the 87 air victories won (by all German air units) during the fighting on the Somme. Our *Jagdstaffeln* forced the enemy, who had hitherto been so sure of himself, to adopt a cautious reserve, the effects of which were gratefully noted by the troops on the ground.'

Oswald Boelcke, arguably the greatest of the Fokker Eindecker aces, had outlived many of his contemporaries. The master air fighter and tactician did not live to see the full fruition of his great efforts, however. He fell on 28 October, at the peak of his success as a *Staffel* leader, when his Albatros D II collided with another flown by Erwin Böhme. The entire German nation mourned the loss of their great hero. However, Boelcke had not died before imparting his superb grasp of aerial tactics and his splendid example to a new generation of *Jagdflieger*. Armed with the potent Albatros fighters, these new pilots were worthy successors to their pioneering predecessors, and they would go on to enjoy their own great successes.



Otto Kissenberth is seen on the left with his friend Ludwig Hanstein, who also achieved his first victory as a member of *KEK Ensisheim* on 12 October. Both men went on to fly in *Jasta 16*, and Hanstein would increase his score to 16 prior to being killed whilst serving as CO of *Jasta 35* on 21 March 1918

APPENDICES

COLOUR PLATES

Artist Harry Dempsey created all of the art in this section, and worked patiently with the author to illustrate the aeroplanes as accurately as circumstances permit. The colours portrayed are approximations at best. The research and assistance of Alex Imrie and Manfred Thiemeyer was of tremendous value. The author is also grateful to Dan-San Abbott, Reinhard Kastner, Ray Rimell, Glen K Merrill and Rick Duiven for their help.

Documentation detailing aircraft colours from this early period is very scarce, and the application of camouflage was in its experimental stage, if in use at all. Most Fokker monoplanes are believed to have been covered in clear-doped fabric, but the linen used was very coarse and (judging from photographs) rather dark and opaque. In addition, the oil staining inevitably darkened the fabric after any appreciable use.

The French periodical *L'aerophile*, in describing a captured Eindecker, stated 'the fabric of the Fokker wings was generally of beige colour in 1916'. Another French description of a Fokker recorded 'wings are a straw yellow with the Maltese Cross'. It is also certainly possible that some Fokker monoplanes were painted in a solid camouflage colour.

British ace J T B McCudden described a Fokker he saw as, 'a long dark brown form'. Other RFC combat reports record a range of impressions of Eindecker colours from 'white' to 'a single-seater monoplane, with dark brown wings on the upper side', to one Eindecker 'painted a butcher blue with white crosses on it'. There is evidence that some Fokkers in Austro-Hungarian service were painted mid-green. For most of the following profiles we have essayed something of a compromise, choosing to portray the finish as a deep opaque beige or light brown, but other interpretations are certainly possible.

1

Fokker A III A 16/15 of Ltn Otto Parschau, FFA 62, Douai, July 1915

This Fokker A III (M 5K, Wk-Nr 216) was equipped with a fixed LMG 14 'Parabellum' gun, and was used by Ltn Otto Parschau as a demonstration aircraft. Parschau had been temporarily assigned to *Feldflieger Abteilung* 62 to instruct its airmen in the use of wing-warping control in preparation for the arrival of the Fokker E I at the unit. The diagonal black and white stripe was also seen on Immelmann's E I, and was probably an early FFA 62 marking. On 16 July 1916 Parschau left FFA 62 and returned to BAO at Ghistelles.

2

Fokker E I E 5/15 of Ltn Kurt Wintgens, FFA 6b, Bühl/Saarburg, August 1915

For the first half of July 1915, Wintgens was temporarily

transferred to *Feldflieger Abteilung* 48 in *Armee Abteilung Gaede* from Bavarian *Feldflieger Abteilung* 6. At that time E 5/15 was adorned with the distinctive black and white markings of A A Gaede, which included the black rudder. Some time after 15 July Wintgens and his Fokker returned to BFFA 6. This was another very early E I with the high shoulder-mounted wing and a Parabellum gun.

3

Fokker E I E 13/15 of Ltn d R Max Immelmann, FFA 62, Douai, August 1915

It is likely this is E 13/15, which was the aircraft in which Immelmann achieved his first victories. The diagonal black/white stripe seems to have been an identification feature of some FFA 62 aircraft. On 16 March 1916, Immelmann wrote that 'My old 80 hp Fokker (the machine with the number E 13) in which I finished off my first five Englishmen is going to be exhibited in the *Zeughaus* in Berlin'. However, the author believes that his fifth victory was actually scored in a different aircraft. Photographs show that this machine was refurbished for display in Germany, with new national insignia applied to the fuselage.

4

Fokker E II 37/15 of Ltn Oswald Boelcke/Ltn d R Max Immelmann, FFA 62, Douai, October 1915

On 9 September Boelcke wrote that he had picked up his new 100 hp Fokker E II 37/15 several days before – he obtained his third victory with it that very day. When Boelcke was transferred to BAM on 19 September, he left E 37/15 behind. It was taken over by Immelmann, who flew it to Lille on 15 November. Here, he flew for King Friedrich August III of Saxony. It is likely this is the machine Immelmann flew for his fifth victory on 26 October.

5

Fokker E I 14/15 of Vfw Eduard Böhme, Kampfeindecker Halbabteilung, FFA 9b, Colmar-Nord, September 1915

This E I is the aircraft Böhme used to down two Farmans on 25 September. The black and white fuselage markings are another example of the insignia applied to aircraft in units allocated to *Armee Abteilung Gaede*. Böhme was a pilot in the 'half-flight of fighter monoplanes' which was attached to FFA 9b, which duly became KEK Ensisheim.

6

Fokker E II 33/15 of Vfw Eduard Böhme, KEK Ensisheim, FFA 9b, January 1916

Böhme was photographed with this machine, which is thought to be E II 33/15 – an aircraft also flown by Otto Kissenberth. In this case, the AA Gaede black/white stripes

are vertical, and the black rudder is also applied. Böhme died in this aircraft, or a very similar one, on 24 January 1916.

7

Fokker E I 43/15 of Offz-Stv Willy Rosenstein, FFA 19, Porcher, August 1915

The highly experienced pre-war flier Rosenstein brought this aircraft to *Feldflieger Abteilung 19* on 6 September and flew it extensively for two months, recording several inconclusive combats in it. When the E I arrived at the unit it bore no fuselage markings except for the serial number. The black/white bands and national insignia were then applied. Rosenstein would later score at least eight victories.

8

Fokker E II 69/15 of Ltn Kurt Freiherr von Crailsheim, FFA 53, Monthois, September 1915

The colours of the fuselage bands applied to this E II are unrecorded, but they were apparently a personal embellishment by von Crailsheim. It is likely that the leading two stripes were the black/yellow colours of von Crailsheim's Württemberg Military Merit Medal, with Prussian black and white completing the insignia. A photograph of this aircraft after it had been returned to the factory seems to show the fuselage as a very dark, streaky colour, but this is probably due to heavy oil staining.

9

Fokker E II (serial unknown) of Ltn Kurt Freiherr von Crailsheim, FFA 53, Monthois, October 1915

Von Crailsheim wrote off his first Fokker in a forced landing in early October and received this new one by the 10th. The same fuselage insignia was applied, but this time the Iron Cross emblem was painted forward of the individual marking. Von Crailsheim crashed in this aircraft on 30 December 1915 and succumbed to his injuries five days later.

10

Fokker E II (serial unknown) of Vfw Ernst Udet, KEK Habsheim, circa March 1916

Although this machine has previously been identified as E III 105/15, this author believes that to have been in error. This machine clearly appears to have been an E II or even an E I. The leading stripe of the fuselage marking has been interpreted as red or blue. However, as KEK Habsheim was one of the units in *AA Gaede*, it is very likely the stripe was a washed out or faded black, as that colour was specified. The faded appearance of the stripe in the well-known photo may also be partly due to the varying effects of orthochromatic film and sunlight.

11

Fokker E III LF 196 of Ltn zur See Gotthard Sachsenberg, Nr I Marine Feldflieger Abteilung, Mariakerke, circa November 1915

Gotthard Sachsenberg, the future 31-victory ace and leader of the *Marine-Jagdgeschwader*, gained his first experience flying fighters in Fokker monoplanes in the I *Marine FFA*. In 1915 the German Navy was beginning to use more and more land-based aircraft, and in October these were designated with 'LF' (for *Landflugzeug*, land aircraft). Fokker E III LF 196

(Wk-Nr 480) was flown by Sachsenberg and other pilots, and was written off on 20 November.

12

Fokker E III 96/15 of Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke, Fokkerstaffel, Ottoman Fliegerabteilung 6, Galata, circa December 1915

Buddecke was commander of the *Fokkerstaffel*, which was re-designated as *Fliegerabteilung 6* in the Ottoman army air service at some point in January 1916. In December, three Fokker monoplanes had arrived on the Gallipoli Front – E II 93/15 (Turkish army number F 4), E III 96/15 (F 3) and E III 108/15 (F 2). When photographed, E III 96/15 seems to have borne a light finish, with the Iron Crosses painted over to produce the Ottoman insignia of black squares.

13

Fokker E III (serial unknown) of Ltn Hans-Joachim Buddecke, Ottoman Fliegerabteilung 6, Galata, circa February 1916

At some unknown point, at least one of the Fokkers flown by Buddecke was painted in an unknown overall dark colour. We have arbitrarily chosen to portray this aircraft in a brown finish. Buddecke attained at least four or five confirmed victories on the Gallipoli front in his initial tour of duty there during the first four months of 1916.

14

Fokker E IV 123/15(?) of Oblt Oswald Boelcke, Kommando Sivry, circa April 1916

By the time Boelcke organised *Kommando Sivry* on 11 March 1916, he was flying this Fokker E IV. It is believed to have been one of the two prototypes (probably 123/15) which was originally designed for three guns. The left-hand gun was removed, resulting in an asymmetric arrangement. Boelcke's machine was distinguished by the broad white band around the fuselage. The wheel covers were probably divided into red, black and white segments.

15

Fokker E IV (serial unknown) of Oblt Ernst Freiherr von Althaus, KEK Vaux, circa April 1916

As with so many photographs from this period, there is a paucity of data about the locale and date of the reference shot for this profile. The date and unit cited are not confirmed. Von Althaus did indeed fly this E IV, marked with a black 12-pointed star on the white wheel cover as a personal marking. Individual emblems were often limited to small insignia on the wheel covers at this early stage of aerial warfare.

16

Fokker E IV 147/15 of Ltn d R Walter Höhndorf, KEK Vaux, Summer 1916

Once again, the date and particulars of the photograph of this machine are unconfirmed. Exhaust fumes obliterated part of the serial number, but this aircraft came from the second production batch (436-441/15) ordered in November 1915. The enigmatic inscription *La Ramont 6.III.16* appeared in a rectangular border on the aft fuselage. The significance of this is unknown to the author.

17

Fokker E IV (serial unknown) of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 Fokkerstaffel, Leffincourt, August 1916

Kurt Student recorded that he scored his first three victories in this machine (fitted with a headrest) in July and August 1916. The decoration of the wheel covers in equal segments of black and white was a characteristic of monoplanes flown by this unit.

18

Fokker E II(?) (serial unknown) of Ltn Otto Parschau, Kagohl 1, Ghisteltes, early 1916

As ever, much of the data concerning this aircraft is speculative. The photograph on which this artwork is based supposedly depicts one of Parschau's machines. Therefore, the locale, date and even aircraft type given here remain highly provisional. The only decorative embellishment evident was the black and white circles on the wheel covers, but note the rack for flare cartridges attached to the cockpit side.

19

Fokker D I 168/16 of Hptm Oswald Boelcke, Jasta 2, Bertincourt, September 1916

The photograph of this Fokker D I was originally captioned as 'Bölke's Fokker' (sic). It is thought that the aircraft was part of the initial equipment of Jasta 2, and although it was probably flown by Boelcke, whether he attained any victories in it or not remains unknown. The early Fokker D-types were covered in light clear-doped linen, and the national insignia were often applied directly to the fabric with no white backgrounds.

20

Fokker D III 352/16 of Hptm Oswald Boelcke, Jasta 2, Bertincourt, September 1916

There is no doubt that Boelcke successfully flew this machine in combat, scoring as many as seven of Jasta 2's first victories. It was also finished in very pale clear-doped linen, with the crosses painted directly onto the translucent fabric.

21

Fokker D II 540/16 of Ltn d R Otto Kissenberth, KEK Ensishheim, October 1916

This aircraft bore a factory finish of camouflage in two colours (reddish brown and dark green) applied to the top surfaces of the fuselage and wings. Once it reached KEK Ensishheim, further camouflage was added to the fuselage sides and also to the white cross fields on the wings and rudder, resulting in the multi-hued and rather makeshift colour scheme evident in the many air-to-air photographs that exist of this aircraft. The colours depicted are entirely speculative.

22

Fokker D II 541/16 of Ltn d R Josef Jacobs, Fokkerstaffel West/Jasta 12, Chauny, October 1916

Although he was ill for most of this period, Jacobs reported the events occurring in the transition of Fokkerstaffel West into elements of Jasta 12 in his diary on a daily basis. On 11 October he wrote 'I received permission to drive to Chauny. First I visited my Fokker, which had been painted dark blue'. Although no photographs of D II 541/16 in this state are

known to exist, the author and artist felt it was still worthy of a reconstruction. Therefore, all of the details of this profile remain provisional.

23

Fokker D II 368/16 of Vfw Ernst Udet, Jasta 15, Habsheim, October 1916

With his usual artistic flair, Udet fashioned a tin plate 'observer' to fool the enemy, and affixed it to the fuselage of his D II 368/16. The aircraft was otherwise painted in green and brown factory camouflage, with clear-doped undersides. All national insignia on the upper surfaces were presented on white fields.

24

Fokker D II 1017/16 of Vfw Ernst Udet, Jasta 15, Habsheim, circa December 1916

This aircraft is also reported to have been flown by Udet at Habsheim. On this machine, the white cross backgrounds were painted out to produce narrow white borders. The deterioration of paint applied to the cowling of the rotary-engined Fokker D-types was almost guaranteed after any period of use.

25

Nieuport 16 (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Gustav Leffers, Jasta 1, Bertincourt, September 1916

Gustav Leffers was one of several German airmen who sallied forth into battle in captured Nieuports, and RFC combat reports indicate that he apparently flew this Nieuport 16 at this time. The machine was painted an unknown light colour, which has been provisionally shown as a light grey.

26

Nieuport 11 1324 of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 Fokkerstaffel, Leffincourt, July 1916

This machine was originally flown by Sous-Lt Jean Raty of Escadrille N38, who was shot down by Kurt Student on 6 July 1916 and made a PoW. Student then had the aeroplane fitted with a synchronised 'Spandau' gun. Initially the aircraft was flown in its original French green and brown camouflage, with 'horizon blue' undersides.

27

Nieuport 11 1324 of Oblt Kurt Student, AOK 3 Fokkerstaffel, circa August 1916

Student eventually had his Nieuport painted a very light colour overall, with an interesting 'crossed swords' emblem applied to the fuselage. The colour has been shown as a light blue as per its original French undersurface colour, but white is also possible. The colours of the wheel cover décor are provisional as well.

28

Halberstadt D III (serial unknown) of Ltn Hans von Keudell, Jasta 1, Bertincourt, September 1916

Hans von Keudell was one of the early stars of Jasta 1, and he flew this Halberstadt decorated with his initial. The early Halberstadt fighters displayed a pale 'sky camouflage' finish, which is here depicted as clear-doped light beige linen, with the forward panels painted to match. When he was an

instructor at Valenciennes, Josef Jacobs recorded what he called a 'white Halberstadt', which seems to support this interpretation. Another plausible interpretation is that they were given a pale blue finish overall.

29

Halberstadt D III (serial unknown) of Oblt Ernst Freiherr von Althaus, Jasta 4, Vaux, September 1916

Later examples of the Halberstadt fighters were finished with upper and side surfaces sprayed in reddish-brown and olive green camouflage, with light blue undersides. No unit markings were yet in vogue, but von Althaus applied his personal 'A' emblem to the aft fuselage. This is provisionally interpreted here as black.

30

Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Oblt Hans Berr, Jasta 5, Gonnellieu, early 1916

Based on an indistinct photo, this profile tentatively illustrates this Halberstadt fighter as a D V. It is recorded that Hans Berr's later Albatros bore the numeral '1', thus it is quite likely

that this number was also marked on his Halberstadt too. It displayed typical camouflage of the period.

31

Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Oblt Hans-Joachim Buddecke, Jasta 4, Vaux, circa October 1916

Buddecke's camouflaged D V was identified by two light-coloured vertical bands on either side of the fuselage cross panel. The colour of these bands is unrecorded, and both light blue and a very light yellow have been suggested. We have arbitrarily chosen to illustrate the former.

32

Halberstadt D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Josef Jacobs, Jagdstaffelschule I, Valenciennes, December 1916

Although Jacobs did not fly this particular aeroplane in combat, it is representative of a type he would later fly with success in Jasta 22, and is well recorded in photographs. The aircraft displayed the usual olive green and reddish-brown camouflage. Large numbers painted on the fuselage sides identified most aircraft at the *Jastaschule*.

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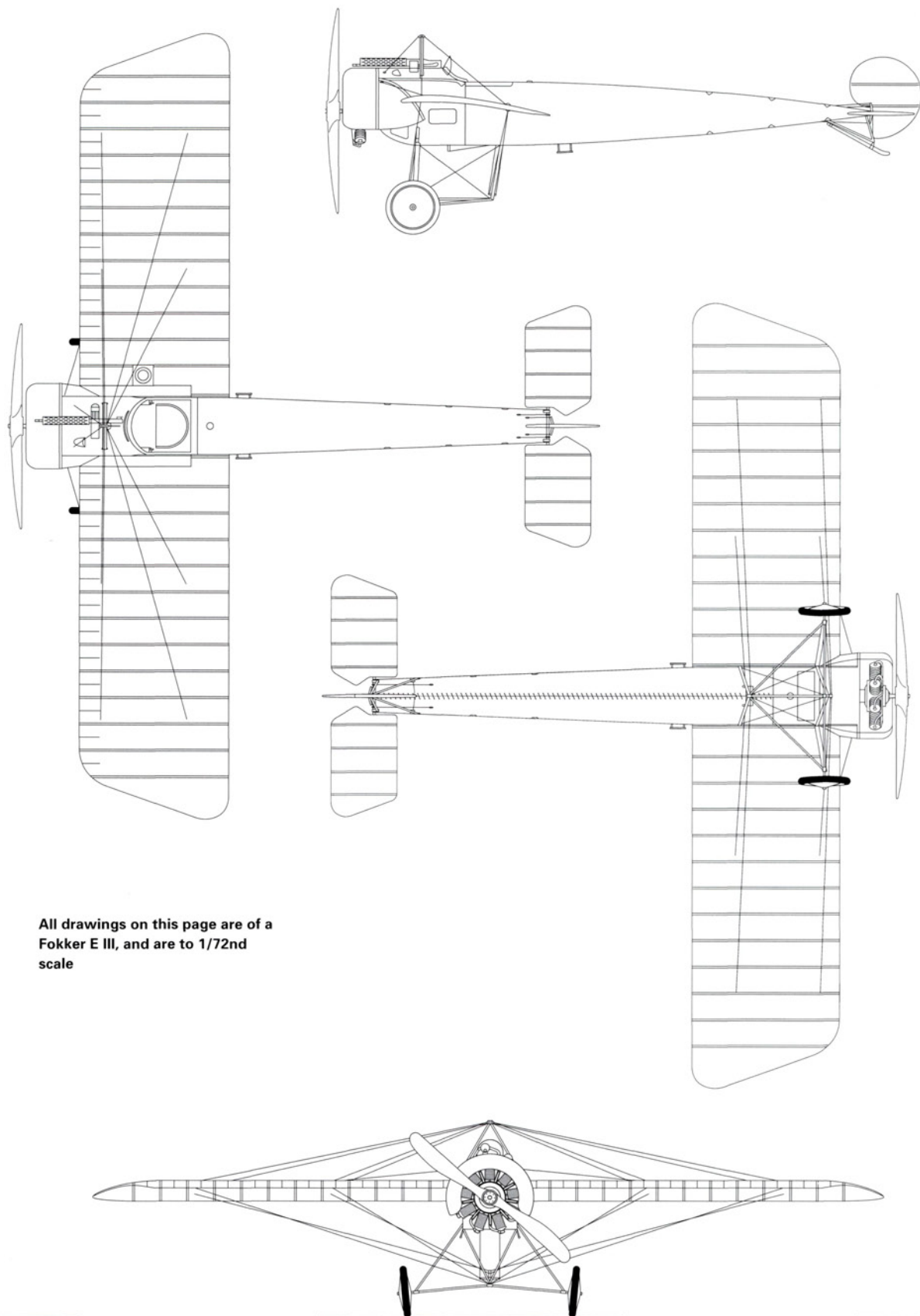
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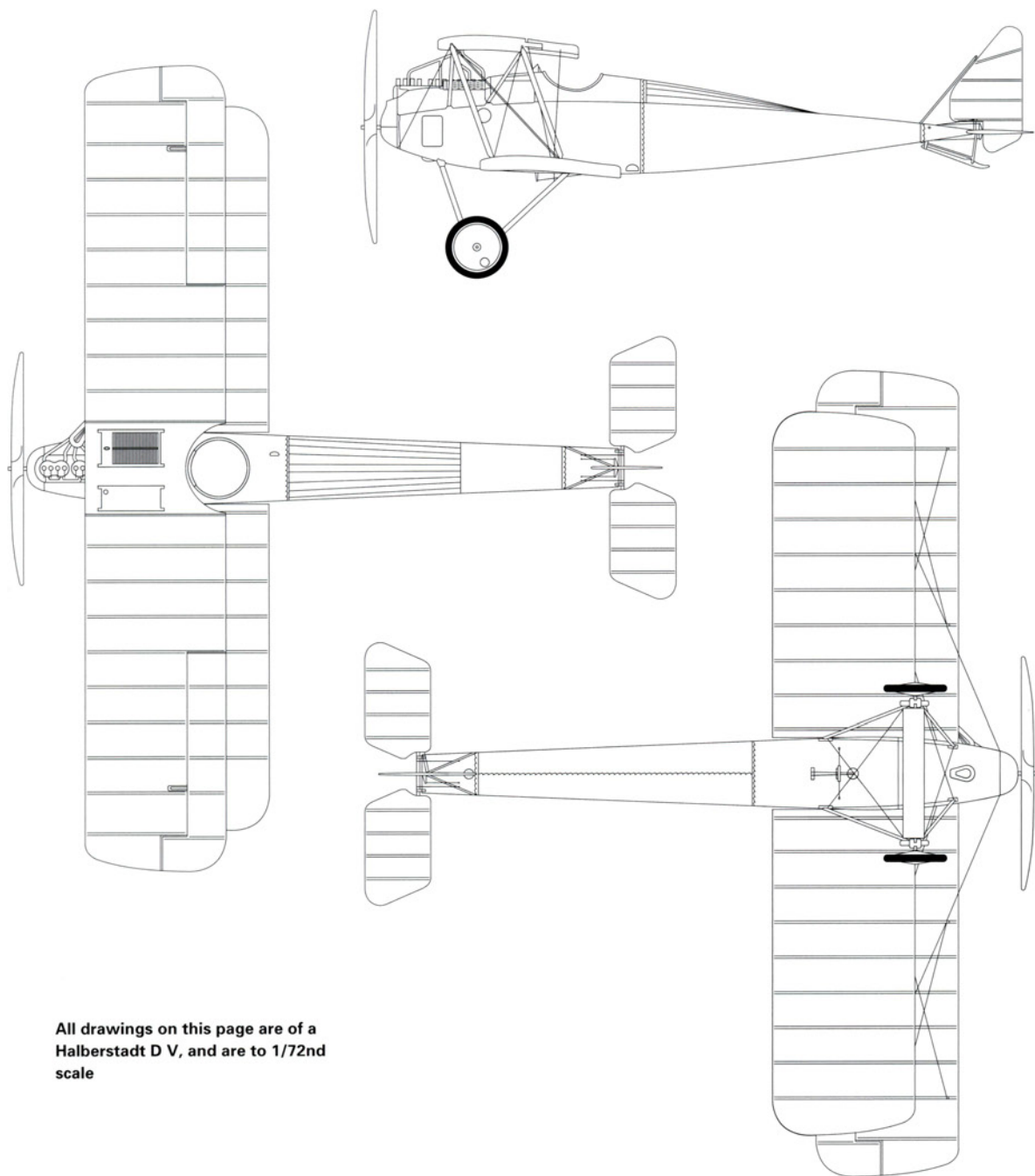
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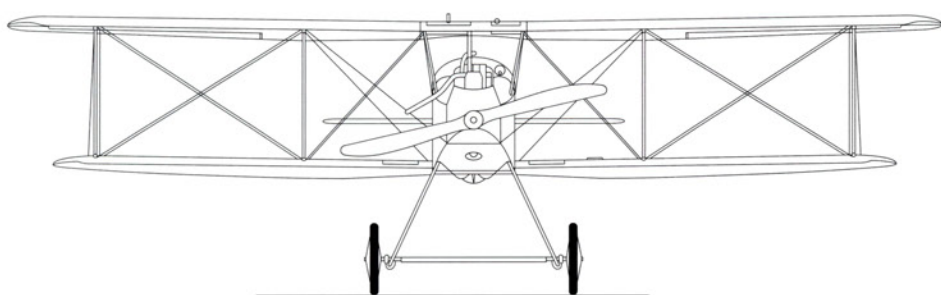
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All drawings on this page are of a
Fokker E III, and are to 1/72nd
scale



All drawings on this page are of a
Halberstadt D V, and are to 1/72nd
scale



INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**. Plates are shown with page and caption locators in brackets.

AEG G type aircraft 6, **18**, 18

Aked, Lt H L C **56**

Althaus, Lt Ernst *Freiherr* von 17, **18**, 19–20, as Oblt 26, 27, 32, **33**, **15**, 42, 90, **29**, 46, 92, **52**, 53, 55, 56, 67, with *Jastas* 1 and 4: 74, **77**, 77, **78**, 79

Andrews, Lt (later Capt) J O 51, 66

armament, early WWI aircraft 6–7, **8**, **8**, **9**, **14**, **22**, **25**, **81**; propeller synchronisation devices 6–7, **8**, 12

Baldamus, Hartmut 68

Barrington-Kennett, Maj V A 37

Behling, Alfred 80

Bernert, Lt Fritz Otto 77, 78, 79, 80–81, **81**

Berr, Oblt Hans 35, 35–36, **30**, 46, 92, 81, **82**, 82

Berthold, Lt (later Hptm) Rudolf 17, **18**, 18, 19, **77**, 77, 78, 79, 80; as Oblt 32–33, **33**, 37, 52–53, 55, 56

Bethge, Oblt Hans 71, 72

Birdwood, 2Lt H F **35**

Boelcke, Oswald **22**, **29**, **30**, **50**, **63**, 88; as Lt 10, 12–14, **13**, 16–17, 18, 29–30, **43**, 89; with *BAM* 23–24, **25**, 25; with *Kommando Sivry* 34, 35, 36–37, **37**, as Oblt 14, 42, 48, 90, 50; as Hptm 19, **20**, 43, 91, 53, 55, 56, 57, 60, 61, **75**, report on Fokker E IV 51; Turkish service 63, 69; with *Jasta* 2: 70, 75–77, **76**, **77**

Boelcke, Wilhelm 13, 69

Böhme, Vfw Eduard 21–23, **23**, **25**, 5, 6, 40, 89–90

Böhme, Lt Erwin 58, 75, 76–77, 88

Bohnstedt, Hptm Eberhard 34

Bonet, Fusilier 31, 32

Buddecke, Hptm Hans-Joachim 17, 17–19, **19**, 20, **27**, 27–28; as Oblt 12, **13**, 41–42, 90, **31**, 46, 47, 92, 56, 62, 73, 74, **77**, **77**, **78**, 78, 79–80, **80**

Büssing, Vfw **82**

Chapman, Sgt Victor 57, 61–62, **62**

Crailsheim, Lt Kurt *Freiherr* von 20–21, **21**, **8**, 9, 40–41, 90)

Cunningham-Reid, Lt D F **29**

Cymera, Wilhelm 75

Darley, Capt C C 4, **24**, 24

de Havilland DH 2: 51

Dittrich, Vfw Walter 63

Ernhaller, Karl 75

Falkenhayn, Gen von 24

Fokker Aeroplanbau GmbH 8

A I/A II (M 5K/M 5L) 7–8

A III (M 5K) **8**, **8**, **9**, **1**, 39, 89)

D I 14, 93, 91, 67, 68, 75, **77**, 83

D II 21, 44, 48, 91, **22**, 24, 44, 91, 67, **68**, 68, **85**, **86**, 87, 82, **83**, 86

D III 20, 43, 91, 67, 68, 75, 76, 76, **86**, 86, **87**

D IV **75**

E (Eindecker; A III; M 5K/M 5G) 4, 8–9, 12, **17**, **25**, **35**, **49**, **65**

E I 18, 20, 1/15 10, 3/15 13, 14, 5/15 11, 11, 12, 12, 2/39, 89; 13/15 14, 14, 15, 3/39, 47, 89; 14/15

22, 22–23, 5/40, 89; 33/15 23, 43/15 21, 7/40, 90)

E II 21, **22**, **31**, **9**, 10, 41, 90, **18**, 43, 91; 33/15 6/40, 89–90; 37/15 17, **24**, 28, 28, 4/39, 89; 69/15 21, 21, 8/40, 90; Wk-Nr 257 **7**

E III 4, **22**, 25, **28**, **31**, **13**, 42, 90, 55; 8/45 26, 26, 27, 34, 37–38, 96/15 27, 12, 41, 90; 105/15 50, 108/15 90; 411/15 33, 608/15 54, 54; 246/16 59–60, 60, 61, 339/16 55, 82; LF 196: 11(41, 90)

E IV 25, **29**, **34**, **37**, **15**, 42, 90, **17**, 43, 91, 50, 51, **64**, **65**, **66**, 73, 122/15 66; 123/15(7) **25**, 14, 42, 48, 90; 124/15(7) **57**, 62, 147/15 16, 42, 90; 183/16 52, **67**

Fokker, Anthony H G 7, 7, 8, 9–10, 13, 14, 15–16, 67

Förster, Maj Helmut 8

France, *Aviation Militaire* 36; *Escadrille* N124 57, 61, **62**, 84, 86; *Groupe de Bombardement* 4: 84, 85–86

Frankl, Lt d R Wilhelm 31, 31–32, **56**, 56, 62, 68, 74, **77**, 77, 78–79, **80**, 80, 81

German air service (*Fliegertruppe*) 6

Abwehrkommando-Nord (formerly *KEK* Bertincourt; later *Jasta* 1) 71

Armee Abteilung Gaede (formerly *KEK* Habsheim) 12, 12, **22**, **23**, 49

Armee-Oberkommando (AOK) 3, *Fokkerstaffel* 4, 17(43, 91), **26**, 27(45, 47, 91), **64**, **64**, **65**, 69

Brieftauben-Abteilung Ostende (BAO) 9, 72

Feldflieger Abteilung (FFA) 6; FFA 5b 58; FFA 6b 11, 11, **12**, 2/39, 89; FFA 9b **22**, **22**, 5/40, 89, 84–86, 88, FFA 13: 13; FFA 19: 7/40, 90; FFA 23: 17, 17–20, **18**, 20, 27, 32; FFA 32: 26, 33; FFA 48: 12, 12; FFA 53: **21**, **8**, 9/40–41, 90; FFA 62: 4, **8**, 9, 12–17, 14, 29, 29–30, 1/39, 89, 3/39, 47, 89, 4/39, 89, 58

Fokkerstaffel-Ost 50–51

Fokkerstaffel West (later *Jasta* 12) 22(44, 91), 50–51, 54, 54–55, 83

Idflieg (Inspectorate of military aviation) 8, 51, 67, 68

Jagdstaffel (*Jasta*) 70–71; *Jasta* 1: 25(45, 48, 91), 28(45, 48, 91–92), 70, 71–75, **72**, **73**, **74**, **75**, *Jasta* 2: 19, 20(43, 91), 70, 75–77, **76**, 79, 88; *Jasta* 4: 29(46, 92), 31(46, 47, 92), 70, 77–81, **78**, **79**, **80**, **81**, *Jasta* 5: 30(46, 92), 70, 81, 81–82, **82**, *Jasta* 12: 22(44, 91), 82–83, **83**, *Jasta* 15: 23, 24(44, 91), 84, 86, 86–87, **87**, 88; *Jasta* 16: 84

Jagdstaffelschule 1 32(46, 92), 74, 74, 83

Kagohl 35, 18(43, 91)

Kampfinsitzer Abteilung 1: 20

Kampfinsitzer-Kommando (KEK) 26; *KEK* Avillers (later *KEK* 'Ost', *Jasta* 5) 34, **35**, 36, 81; *KEK* Bertincourt (later *Abwehrkommando Nord*) 26, 34, 62, 63, 64, **66**, *KEK* Douai (KEK 3) 28, 58, 59, 61; *KEK* Ensisheim (later *Jasta* 16) 6(40, 89–90), 21(44, 48, 91), **84**, **85**, **86**, 88; *KEK* Habsheim (later *Armee Abteilung Gaede*, *Jasta* 15) 38, 10(41, 90), 49, 49, 50, 84; *KEK* Jametz, *Kommando Sivry* 34, 35, 37, 14(42, 48, 90), **52**, **52**; *KEK* Vaux (later *Abwehrkommando Süd*, *KEK* Süd, *Jasta* 4) 32, 33, 37, 15, 16(42, 90), 52–53, 62, 65, 77

German Military Mission in Turkey, *Fokker Staffel* (later Ottoman Air Service, *Fliegerabteilung* 6) 27, 27, **28**

German Navy, *Nr 1 Marine Feldflieger Abteilung* 11(41, 90)

Gersdorff, Hptm Ernst *Freiherr* von 19, 61

Glinkemann, Uffz Willy 49

Haber, Lt d R Kurt 86, 87

Haehnel, Hptm Wilhelm 34, 64, 81

Halberstadt

D II 67, 68, **74**, **78**, 83

D III 15, 28(45, 48, 91–92), 29(46, 92), 67, 68, **74**, **78**, 79, 80

D V 30(46, 92), 31(46, 47, 92), 32(46, 92), **80**, **84**

D-type 61, 73, **82**, 83

Hanstein, Vfw Ludwig 85, 87, **88**

Heinemann, Vfw Wolfgang 59, 66

Hennebeil, Vfw Wilhelm 83

Hess, Lt d R Ernst 29, 29, 30, 30

Hilz, Vfw 85

Hobbs, 2Lt A V **28**

Hoeneemanns, Oblt Erich 51, 55, 83

Hoepfner, Gen (later Genlt) Ernst von 35, 88

Höndorff, Lt d R Walter 32, 32, 16(42, 90), **52**, 57, 62, 66, 67, 68; with *Jastas* 1 and 4: 71, 73, 74, **77**, **78**

Höhne, Lt Otto 77, 79

Holck, Rittmeister Erich Graf von 53

Holstein, Gen Armin von 29

Hulin, MdL 54–55

Immelmann, Max 10, 13, **28**, 28–29, **29**, **30**, **30**, **35**, **36**, 37, 50, 51, 52; as Lt d R 4, 13, 14, 14–16, 15, 17, 18, 24, 24, 3/39, 47, 89, 4/39, 89; as Oblt 13, 56, 57, **58**, 58–59; death and funeral 59–61, **60**

Jacobs, Lt d R Josef 22(44, 91), 32(46, 92), 53–55, **54**, 55, 73–74, **80**, 82, **83**, 83, 84

Jacquin, Cpl 32, **33**

James, Capt C E H **56**

Kastner, Hptm Hermann 13, 17, **29**, 30

Keudell, Lt Hans von 28(45, 48, 91–92), **71**, 71, 72, **74**, 74, **75**, 75

Kiliani, Lt 85–86, **87**, 87, 88

Kissenberth, Lt d R Otto 21(44, 48, 91), **85**, 85–86, **86**, **87**, 87–88, **88**

Kralewski, Lt d R **77**

Leffers, Lt d R Gustav 26, 26–27, 34, 37–38, **25**(45, 48, 91), 56, 62, 63; with *Jasta* 1: 71, **72**, **72**, 74, 74, 75

Lenz, Lt d R Alfred **77**

Lieth-Thomsen, Maj (later Obstlt) Hermann von der 26, 30, 34, 69, 70

Malchow, Lt d R Hans **77**

Margot, Vfw Hermann **77**

Morane BB 35, **68**, 68

Morane Parasol **28**

Müller, Offz Stv Hans Karl **81**, 81, 82

Mulzer, Fähnrich (later Lt) Max *Ritter* von 37, **51**, 51–52, 56, 59, 60, **61**, **63**, 63, 64, 68–69, 82, 83

Nieuport 11: 36, **26**, 27(45, 47, 91), **52**, 61, **64**, **64**, **65**

Nieuport 16: **25**(45, 48, 91), **72**

Notzke, Lt Werner 52

Österreicher, Lt Albert 29, **30**, 30, 59

Ottoman *Fliegerabteilung* 6, *Fokkerstaffel* 12, **13**(41–42, 90)

Palmer, 2Lt C W **35**

Parent, Pilot Sgt 31, 32

Parschau, Lt Otto 8, 9–10, **10**, 13, 24, **29**, 1/39, 89, 56, 62, 67, with *Kagohl* 1: 36, **18**(43, 91), **65**, with *AKN* 64, **66**, 66

Pearson, 2Lt L J 33–34

Pfalz E IV 53

Pfalz E type 25, 53

Pfäzler, Lt d R Otto 86, 87

Pfeiffer, Vfw Hermann 69, 69

Pfleiderer, Lt 88

Raty, Sous-Lt Jean 64, 91

Reimann, Hans 79

Reimann, Uffz Leopold Rudolf 63, 75, 71, 79

Richthofen, Manfred von 75, 76–77, 79, 82

Robinson, 2AM T 59, **60**

Rosenstein, Offz-Stv Willy 21, 7/40, 90)

Royal Aircraft Factory

BE 2c: 20, **29**, **36**

BE 12: 79

FE 2b: **56**, 59, **60**

Royal Flying Corps 31; No 11 Sqn 4, **24**, 24

Sachsenberg, Lt zur See Gotthard 11(41, 90)

Savage, Lt J R B 59, **60**

Schaller, Gefr **65**

Schmedes, Lt Otto 53

Schneider, Franz 7, 8

Schramm, Lt Werner 64, 66

Schulz, Hptm Julius 19

Seckendorf, Lt von **29**

Segaud, Soldat 32, **33**

Serno, Hptm Erich 27–28, **28**, **79**

Siebert, Oblt Wilhelm 66

Sievers, Oblt Dr Ernest 58–59

Slade, 2Lt R J 4, **24**, 24

Smith, Lt N Gordon 29

Somerville, 2Lt W E 29

Somme, Battle of the 62–69, 88

Splitgerber, Lt d L 83

Stabl, Hptm 87

Stehle, Lt d R Karl **77**

Stempel, Maj Friedrich 58, 60

Stott, Capt J N S 18–19

Student, Oblt Kurt 4, **17**(43, 91), **26**(45, 47, 91), **27**(45, 91), **64**, **64**, **65**, 69

Szyba, Vfw **65**

Thiberghien, Lt Marcel **52**

Tudor-Jones, 2Lt C E G **28**

Tütschulte, Erwin 61

Udet, Vfw Ernst 38, **10**(41, 90), **23**, **24**(44, 91), **49**, 49, 84, **86**, 86–87, **87**

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